

Editorial

This Special Issue looks at new developments within an area of practice that FORUM, with its rich history of advocacy for genuinely comprehensive public education, has always been supportive of, namely 'Student Voice'.

In the past, we have tended to approach student voice from either the standpoint of young people being given greater responsibility for their own learning through a more imaginative and flexible pedagogy, or we have concentrated on ways in which institutional forms of student engagement, such as school councils, could develop a more authentic collective voice that would lead, if not to a more democratic, then at least to more engaged forms of institutional and personal learning. Those concerns and aspirations remain. What is particularly interesting here is the fact that some of the new developments presented by a range of contributors seem to provide a bridge between the individual/pedagogic and the collective/school council practices that have so often provided the two poles of past student voice work.

Now, at least within many of the examples explored and celebrated within this Special Issue, there is a sense in which not only the previously forbidden area of teaching and learning is becoming a legitimate focus of enquiry from the standpoint of students as well as teachers, but also that the roles of teachers and students are beginning to become less exclusive and excluding of each other. Similarly, there is an emerging interconnectedness between and expansion of the arenas of classroom life, the wider contexts of the school as a whole, and community spaces and practices that exist outside the school. The reciprocity between student and teacher, school and community that have always been at the heart of a widely and richly conceived notion of education seems to be expressing itself in new ways and new forms that may hold out much hope for the future.

We open our Student Voice Special Issue with three articles by young people who have been involved in some of the creative and vibrant developments alluded to above. Pupils at Wheatcroft Primary School in Hertford give a hugely uplifting and inspiring account of *Working as a Team*; Beth Crane's advocacy of the 'Students as Researchers' initiative as means of *Revolutionising School-based Research* and her fellow ex-Sharnbrook Upper School student, Chris Harding's, insistence that '*Students as Researchers*' is as important as the *National Curriculum* lay appropriately challenging and exciting foundations for the rest of the Special Issue.

Louise Raymond's overview of the groundbreaking 'Students as Researchers' initiative in her *Student Involvement in School Improvement: From Data Source to Significant Voice*, provides a fascinating case study of how a small but radical student-led initiative can grow into something that has the potential to transform the nature of curriculum renewal and organisational learning. Leora

Cruddas's account of working with young women with emotional and behavioural difficulties reminds us of the capacity of young people to work in ways which exceed inappropriately narrow expectations of teachers and fellow students. Her *Rehearsing for Reality: Young Women's Voices & Agendas for Change* also reminds us of the culpability of schools as-they-too-often-are in denying the creativity and responsibility that young people have within them to develop together with each other and their teachers.

Kate Bullock and Felicity Wikelely's *Personal Learning Planning: Strategies for Pupil Learning* again points to the possibility of pupil agency, but reminds us how far we have yet to go to listen and learn together in ways which are mutually fulfilling for those involved. Sara Bragg's *Taking a Joke: Learning from Voices We Don't Want to Hear* is at once disturbing and inspiring. It provides a challenge, later taken up by Elena Silva in this Special Issue, that centres round the difficult problem of what our most appropriate response is to voices we find initially offensive or in other ways unacceptable to our current way of doing things. Other challenges to a too easy advocacy of student voice are taken up in Perpetua Kirby's *Participatory Research in Schools*. Her comprehensive overview of both the issues and the opportunities of working with young people in research is an important corrective to the quick recourse to questionnaires and other surface means of engagement that are so often predominantly adult and accountability driven.

In their *Supporting Teachers in Consulting Pupils about Aspects of Teaching and Learning and Evaluating Impact* John MacBeath, Kate Myers and Helen Demetriou offer us a number of very interesting examples of emerging practices that move steadily and thoughtfully beyond our traditional ways of working. However, as Isobel Urquhart's '*Walking on Air*'? *Pupil Voice & School Choice* reminds us, we also have to face up to the very uneven realities of very uneven progress. The disappointments and duplicity of an always unreal 'choice' for working class students in a market-driven system of education is an absolute outrage: and yet many seem to remain resilient, despite the manifest betrayal they suffer.

How interesting that we can look to Chile for leadership in citizenship education. Marcia Prieto's *Students as Agents of Democratic Renewal in Chile* is an inspiring account of innovative practice between the university sector and schools that holds many lessons for us all, not least of which is the increasing capacity of mutual learning between adults and students, thus blurring traditional role boundaries and pointing us towards the possibility of a more 'radical collegiality' for the 21st century. The two contributions from North America also have much to teach us, largely through their patient and fearless engagement with issues that have too often been

glossed over in the understandable desire to promote student voice. Dana Mitra's *Opening the Floodgates: giving students a voice in school reform* is, perhaps, the more reassuring of the two, alluding in a number of places to very positive developments that hold out the possibility of mutual learning. Elena Silva's; '*Squeaky Wheels and Flat Tires*': a case study of students as reform participants makes distinctly uncomfortable reading. And yet in that discomfort there lie the seeds of student voice as a driving force for change. What she urges us to face is the multiplicity of student voices that speak to us and the undeniable fact that so often only some of those voices get heard, usually those of articulate, middle class, white girls.

If we can grapple honestly with issues bearing on the multiplicity of student (and, indeed, teacher) voices then the student voice movement will really have come of age. My own *Beyond the Rhetoric of Student Voice: new departures or new constraints in the transformation of*

21st century schooling? draws on all the contributors to this Special Issue and on a wide range of published research and work-in-progress. It develops a framework for evaluating the conditions of student voice and through that framework attempts an appraisal of student voice as a force for genuine, positive change in our currently over-determined, largely anachronistic forms of schooling.

The messages, it seems to me, are ambivalent: I do make my own assessment of the way things are likely to go, but with trepidation and a real sense that even tentative forecasts are of little use in themselves: those we agree with we tend to forget about; those we dispute we tend to dismiss. Two things are important: firstly, that we listen to, hear and learn from each other, since it is through dialogue that meaning is made; secondly, we must act together and alone in ways which demonstrate courage, humility and an undeviating sense of hope.

Michael Fielding



Working as a Team: children and teachers learning from each other

PUPILS AT WHEATCROFT PRIMARY SCHOOL

The first article in this Special Issue of *FORUM* on *Student Voice* is by pupils at Wheatcroft Primary School in Hertford. Together with Alison Peacock (see *FORUM* 43 No. 1, Spring 2001) and her colleagues, they have been involved in developing new forms of learning community in which the voices of pupils and the voices of teachers listen to and learn from each other in ways which are not only vibrant, challenging and productive, but joyful. Wheatcroft Primary School is part of Project 4 of the ESRC *Consulting Pupils About Teaching & Learning* programme, details of which appear at the end of this special issue. Email contact: alison.peacock@virgin.net

Oliver was very keen to communicate his ideas:

My name is Oliver and I am in Year 6 at Wheatcroft School.

Recently we have become involved in a research project that is looking at pupil voice. The improvements this research has made for our school have been amazing.

Here are some of the projects we have developed using pupil voice. Some pupils said that they get hungry during lessons, so we started a tuck shop during break time. Since then, no more hunger complaints have been made.

Some pupils said that the playground was getting a bit boring so we had a playground day where instead of lessons we worked outside on improving our playground. Some of our new features include a bug world which will help with our science. Camps which we built out of wood will help with our D & T. Most importantly, we had fun!

Using pupil voice we are managing to work, have fun and if necessary complain. Pupils in my class believe that just sitting in front of a board may help you to work, but without fun, learning is not interesting – therefore children can lose interest in working.

At our school we do not believe in putting people in groups according to ability. Therefore everybody gets the same opportunities.

I think that a lot of schools would benefit from listening to pupil voice. That way pupils feel better by knowing that teachers will listen to them. I know that almost everybody in our school does.

Patrick who joined the school in Year 4 writes:

Our school has been focussing on children's voice, which means teachers listen to children's ideas. Most people think that many things have improved, e.g. the playground, bullying and lessons.

To improve the playground we had a playground day, the activities included building camps, making a bug

world, building a mud pit, painting bugs and trellis and making a natural sculpture. We got £1000 from National Power for including maths in our school grounds.

Some children felt they were being bullied so we made up the bully box and put buddies on the playground.

With the help of teachers and children working together we are making the school a better place.

Poppy, a member of Year 5 comments:

On Red Nose Day, Wheatcroft school had a playground day. Children took part in loads of fun and exciting activities. It was our hard work and great way of working together that got so much done. Now our playground is much more fun – but it is not finished yet!

We have also started a tuck shop at playtime with biscuits and drinks. When we are not hungry we find it easier to think. Biscuits are 10p and drinks are 10p too.

Year 6 had an idea of having buddies on the playground. Every week we change buddies. They are there to help children sort out problems that they can't talk to an adult about. We have two buddies a week and they wear badges so that they can be recognised. Most people think that the buddies are a good idea.

We have also set up a bully box. The bully box is for people to write a note in for the teacher that the teacher will read and come and talk to you. This can really help and is very useful.

Nicola contributes:

My name is Nicola and I am pleased to be a pupil at Wheatcroft school. I have experienced lots of exciting days at Wheatcroft through the years. Now I am in Year 6 and there are still fun activities to come.

A memory of our Playground Day when I built a camp will stay in my head forever. I think that all the children from the nursery to Year 6 think that the day was one of the best days at Wheatcroft.

I treasure the memory of our trip to Barton Turf sailing base in Year 5 when we had picnics, went sailing, stayed up and drank hot chocolate and then went to sleep in a tent of close friends.

I think that the pupil voice assemblies have helped a lot. It's nice to know that some teachers want to know how we feel about learning. The tuck shop opened a few weeks ago because one child said he was too hungry to learn. Now, every morning break, the cooks sell biscuits that they have baked themselves.

I think it is important that the children and teachers have a good relationship – it makes working much easier.

Charlotte writes:

My name is Charlotte. I'm in Year 6 and I want to tell you that I think that listening to children is very important.

Last year we went to Barton Turf sailing base. We didn't do any writing or drawing – we used our eyes and ears. I believe that you can learn without writing. When we were at Barton Turf we went to nature reserves and learnt about animals and plants. We went to windmills to see how they worked.

On our Playground Day people might say that we did no work but we did literacy by writing letters to ask for help and to say thank you. We designed and built camps and some of us helped run a creche where we learnt about looking after younger children safely.

More importantly, I think that listening to children is vital so that children are happier and teachers know what they like and what they can do.

We have opportunities to work, play and help with younger children. This helps me to get on with people. It calms me down and helps me to get to know them and for them to get to know me. It is good for them to have someone to look up to and someone who is there for them.

Wheatcroft has helped me to be me and without the support I have received I would have been upset and depressed.

Andrew remembers taking part in Robot Wars:

My name is Andrew and the school I go to is Wheatcroft. I'm going to tell you about one of the days I liked the best. It was the day we did Robot Wars! We all made a robot in our teams. I built a robot with two friends and we didn't win but one of my other friends did, so it was better than ever. One of the things about Wheatcroft is that they listen to the children and the teachers believe that we can do well. I think that Wheatcroft is one of the best schools in Britain just because they listen to the children. Wheatcroft is just the best!

Harriet, a quiet thoughtful member of Year 6 writes:

I think I'm very lucky to be in a school like Wheatcroft where the teachers listen to your opinions and ideas. We have assemblies every week where we talk about new ideas and solutions for our school and every comment is valued. From this we now have a tuck shop

because some of us get hungry during lessons so we can't concentrate. Also we are re-doing our playground so we can have a good time outside and enjoy the wildlife.

Everyone in our school including the teachers all agree on pupil voice and all think and know that the children are the people who are learning, so they should all have a say about learning.

Ben comments:

I moved here in Year 5 and when I first came through the door the atmosphere was a lot friendlier and everyone was relaxed, not shouting or rushing about. The lessons are not as tough as my old school but they seem to still remember what you know and it also teaches you new things but in an easier way. The teachers are better because they joke about and teach. It is very important to give pupils a say because they are the ones that get taught and come to the school. It could make learning better for children if they get to say what they think is best.

Fay from Year 5 writes:

Here at Wheatcroft we have about 290 children, all of whom have different problems and feelings, but we always try to sort things out. There are many different systems to help sort things quickly, e.g. we have put some boxes around the school that everyone can put a note in that will soon get read by a teacher. These notes are only read by teachers and children cannot take letters out. We also have other systems that are just as successful.

Most of the classrooms are open plan. Sometimes it can be a bit noisy but most of the time it's really good fun because we can work with Year 6.

I think the best thing about Wheatcroft is that we can always talk to teachers about things, they'll always understand. It's important that we get things sorted because if we don't then that's all we'll be thinking about and we'll be too busy worrying to concentrate on work. I really enjoy being at Wheatcroft and being with my friends. We can have fun and be educated at the same time. Wheatcroft is brilliant and I think it's because we get a say in everything.

Victoria observes that 'children are well behaved but are not perfect' she is pleased that 'the buddy system works really well and no-one seems to be upset anymore'.

James enjoyed the playground day and writes:

Our Playground Day was held on Red Nose Day so we did some fund raising. We made a row of pennies that stretched one and a quarter times round our school grounds. On that day we did the most fun things ever. We built camps, made a small town so you can play with cars and miniature people. It didn't matter about science maths or English because we built models for science, measured things to see if they were big enough (maths) and we wrote about what we did in our newsletter 'Team Talk'. The best thing of all that was the most fun was working as a team.

Alison, aged 11, believes passionately in the importance of pupil voice:

Hi my name's Alison, a pupil from Wheatcroft School. I would like to tell the whole world about how important it is to let children have fun in school – writing for the summer 2002 edition of FORUM is just one example of this!

What would Wheatcroft Primary be like without their funny teachers and good music lessons? Their interesting science experiments and their fit netball and football clubs. If Wheatcroft didn't have their school productions, exciting playground days, playful art lessons and educational library I know what it would be – a dungeon trapped in its own dullness. A prison blowing away fun and school trips, sucking out laughter and playfulness. You see, children need to have fun to be interested in the subjects. If they don't like the teacher they won't like the lessons that that teacher teaches. I hope other schools get my point that children need to like the school to get good marks.

Ellen from Year 5 describes the importance of sharing worries:

Here at Wheatcroft School we show our feelings. For instance, we have a bully box where if anything is wrong or we are not sure about something, we write it down and then post it in the box. Normally the next day it would be sorted out. Me and my friends are proud of this because if we didn't have things like this we wouldn't be able to work as well because our problem would be stuck in our mind and we would be fidgeting and we wouldn't be concentrating on our work.

Coral reflects on the benefits of enjoying the learning process:

*My name is Coral and I go to Wheatcroft School. I'm in Year 6 and I will be leaving in July. The day I will remember when I leave, is the first day of Barton Turf school journey because I realised we weren't just there to learn or to have fun, we were there to learn from both. You don't need to learn the fun way but lots of children are different and it is important to ask their points of view and how they learn best – that's what makes Wheatcroft just that little bit more special. **The teachers at Wheatcroft ask children how they feel about the school and if there are any problems. Where there are problems the teachers try to solve them. It is very important for teachers to ask children their point of view.***

Sam explains how his role as a school council member affects his studies:

I am a pupil at Wheatcroft Primary and I am chairman of our School Council. I think that being chairman gives me a responsibility and it makes me feel important and having that feeling makes me want to do better at things so I don't let myself down.

Physical education is my favourite subject because I love sport and fitness. I also like maths and music because they are some of my strong points and I feel I do well in them.

I think that working with other people is important because that way some people learn better and you could make friends and that is also important because

if you know that you've got friends you will feel good about yourself and work better and harder.

I think that the pupil voice project is so important because if the pupils did not get a say in anything it would only be what the teachers think is right. With pupil voice you can tell the teachers what IS right for you – and do better!

Matthew from Year 5 comments 'I would prefer this school to any others because the teachers have time for you'

Gussie joined Wheatcroft in Year 2. She observes:

***I think it is an excellent idea that the teachers and children can work together and be a team. I think we have achieved a lot to work together.** We have developed a kind of newspaper called Team Talk. It comes out once every half term and it tells us about what's happening. The first Team Talk was all about the playground day and what our new playground would be like.*

I was in a different school before I came to Wheatcroft. When I came here all the teachers were really nice and I made friends very quickly. I have enjoyed my school life ever since.

Hannah also joined the school whilst in Key Stage 2. She explains:

The teachers we have are very kind and nice to us all. The children are allowed a say in almost everything. I think that teachers and children have a very good working relationship and I think this is developing very well. When I first came to Wheatcroft I didn't want to make any friends and I didn't want to come to this school, but now I've settled down I think that all the schools I've ever been to should have been like Wheatcroft.

Many children wished their comments to be included in this article and all children had important and valuable contributions to make. We have only been able to include a few extracts of children's writing, but hope that their commitment, enthusiasm and sense of team work shines through. As Anna aged ten, points out 'our pupil voice project is going to help our education, our environment and help other schools'. The children who contributed to this article were inspired by the belief that their views matter and will make a difference. **Clare notes how important it is 'to have your voice heard... because it 'makes you feel free'.** However, she reminds us that 'it is a big responsibility for teachers to make children have good futures'. We certainly have good and bad days at Wheatcroft and should not wish to give the impression that we have all the answers, but the heartwarming comments of children in this article hopefully show that we are heading in the right direction.

Revolutionising School-based Research

BETH CRANE

The second of our contributions from students is from Beth Crane who was involved in the ground-breaking *Students as Researchers* project at Sharnbrook Upper School & Community College, Bedfordshire from its beginnings in 1996 until leaving school in May 2000. She is now studying Mathematics at Imperial College, London. Looking back on her own involvement and on the impact of the initiative on fellow students, staff and the school as a whole, Beth argues that *Students as Researchers* has revolutionised school-based research, fundamentally changed how many staff see students and also changed how students think of themselves.

Email contact: elizabeth.crane@ic.ac.uk

Students as Researchers takes the practice of improving education for all one stage further than many other attempts. It relies on the fact that not only can the students come to school to learn; but that they can and indeed must be an integral part of the school's own learning. Schools cannot learn how to become better places for learning without asking the students. It acknowledges that neither staff nor outside researchers are necessarily ideally placed to ask questions that allow people to get to the root of key issues, or subsequently get honest answers from students about things that matter to them. It would have been ground-breaking to develop a project which consulted students in an attempt to rectify the first problem, but that would still have left the second unsolved. It is with the aim of solving both that the *Student as Researchers* project revolutionised school-based research in Sharnbrook. The research is undertaken by students, working with staff, on behalf of students into the views of all those affected by the topic of research. *Students as Researchers* tackled both issues of (a) who wrote the questions (by making students key players in this process, hopefully resulting in more pertinent inquiry) and (b) the honesty of responses from students. A fundamental factor in *Students as Researchers* is that students will be more honest with fellow students than when answering questionnaires for staff to read. There is less, if not no, fear of reprisals from fellow students where there might be from staff.

The work of students as researchers undoubtedly benefits the school, but in my experience also benefits those involved with the work on a personal level. There are not many opportunities for protracted teamwork in classes. Those available do not include working with students from different year groups; neither do they usually involve working with a member of staff except for assessment purposes. Working with fellow students and staff on a genuinely equal level, tangibly building on the basic notions of respect and value discussed in the training, provided me with a unique experience. Staff and students alike learnt to respect the other individuals in our groups for the exact qualities that might usually cause contention. For example: that somebody else holds a different point of view to your own, or everybody holds a different view to each other, helps a group to get the most out of their research. Continuing blindly along one's personally favoured course of action can lead to disastrous consequences, whereas both explaining your own

reasoning and listening to that of others helps you to identify the best options. As long as the common aim is always borne in mind, a group of very different people can work together effectively to achieve it. These are all invaluable lessons that can only be fully learnt and appreciated when put to practical use, as in the *Students as Researchers* project.

The skills of conducting research we were taught had applications far beyond the *Students as Researchers* project. Learning to look beyond questions before even asking them, to their potential impact and ramifications encourages you to consider the sensitivities and delicacy of a system, thereby minimising the risk of its disruption. The ability to write or ask an unbiased set of questions which will not offend, but will nonetheless uncover weaknesses and ways to improve on them is a skill in great demand. It is also a very rewarding and exciting skill to be allowed, and encouraged, to develop.

Working in supportive group environments encouraged the members of the project to grow in confidence. The group forum, in which opinions and ideas were freely expressed, clarified and sometimes changed, necessitated us exercising and building on existing communication and (especially) diplomatic skills.

As my involvement in the project continued I came to realise more and more that every student is a valued member of the school community, and that how they feel about it does matter. This knowledge not only had a profound affect on a personal level for myself and the other students involved in the project, but also on a school-wide level encourages students to be honest with the school. The research projects undertaken provided the student body with another opportunity to express their opinion, in the knowledge that it would be taken seriously. This kind of knowledge creates an ethos of respect in the establishment, encouraging the student and teaching bodies, both fundamental to the school's development.

Personally, I think *Student as Researchers* underlines that it is not only the duty of the staff and the school to improve, but that it's also the students' duty. I don't mean duty in the sense of it being a chore. For me it became a great pleasure and something I was hugely driven to do. The feeling of giving something back to the school, my fellow students and future students in an on-going way was fantastic. I would not initially have claimed to care particularly about my school (though I came to); but

throughout, I always cared about my schooling! I care about education and making the most of it for both students and staff, and I think *Student as Researchers* helped other students to as well.

Student as Researchers had an impact in many ways. It changed how some staff at the school considered their students, encouraging them to think of students more as

equals, and a source of help in making the most of their teaching. It also changed how students thought of themselves. They came to feel like a more valued and respected resource, and to recognise the fact that they were actually an education knowledge base.



Students as Researchers is as Important as the National Curriculum

CHRIS HARDING

Like Beth Crane, Chris Harding has also been involved in *Students as Researchers* at Sharnbrook Upper School as a student researcher and as a student consultant. Currently in his gap year before going on to do a part-time HND in Business & Personnel Studies at Bedford College, Chris has continued to support the development of the initiative and is undertaking an evaluation of its impact on the school as a learning community. Here he argues strongly, that *Students as Researchers* not only helped him to remain at school, but that it deepened his engagement with education. Email contact: chrisharding@cs.com

In the early years of my school life, my education was something that I was only a part of and I had no reason or allowance to question anything that was being done to me.

I have always needed more out of life than what is offered to me but in my lower and middle schools I had been socialised to accept what I had and not search for something else because that something was not there.

When I entered the first year of upper school I carried on as usual just having education done to me and not responding to anything other than what was inside the classroom. Not being musical or sporty I assumed that there would be nothing else for me to do and with the socialisation that I had had, I did not expect there to be 'another world' out there.

At the end of my first year at upper school I had my end of year interview with my form tutor who told me that I was not an active participant within the school community and that I needed to get more involved. He advised me of the avenues that were available and pushed me forward to become involved.

In February 1996 (the spring term of Year 10), I was approached by the deputy head teacher of the school and asked to become involved in a project – *Students as Researchers* – linked with the University of Cambridge. After talking to some friends I decided to accept the offer, partly on the grounds that it would keep my form tutor happy! However I had my doubts about *Students as Researchers* because of the abnormality of a project of this kind at a time when no other schools had anything similar.

I was trained in research methods and the ethics of research and formed with a group that was to be looking at profiling and assessment within the school. We spent approximately 6 months gathering data and preparing findings ready to feed into the senior management team of the school. At the time the teachers in the school were also looking at the same topic as us, so at times we worked together and from the combined research, profiling and assessment changed within the school.

This was my motivation to keep going. Finally I had found that extra niche that I needed in order to keep me interested in my studies and motivate me to come to school. From some work that I had done I had influenced the school's feelings about profiling and assessment – so

much so that they changed it, that gave me a great sense of achievement.

Over the four years that I did the project I looked at a number of things that would make an impact on the school. The development for me as an individual was huge and I do not think that mainstream education would have provided me with the opportunities and skills that *Students as Researchers* did. I have given presentations to both small and large numbers of staff and students. As a student consultant to research groups of students I have worked with all school years which no other aspect of school life would have allowed me to do. I have learned how to co-ordinate a small group of people, how to keep them on task and motivated. These are all things that will stay with me for the rest of my life and are all part of the bigger picture of education. I have learned so much from *Students as Researchers*, yet I had to make it take a back seat to my studies when exam pressures arose. I understand that qualifications are important but so are other educational needs. For me this was my educational need and I was lucky enough to be given the opportunity to do it. Others may have dropped out of school because of the lack of student voice within the school community. Education is not something that should be done to you, but something that you should be a part of. I would not have seen my A-levels through had it not have been for *Students as Researchers*.

For the record, and also for those that are saying 'Yes but ...', I would also like to say that this project linked directly into my studies. I learned research techniques that related to my studies in Business and Sociology and also communication skills.

I would defy anyone to rubbish this project because the intrinsic learning that I have had from this initiative has been tremendous and I only have whoever nominated me to thank. To this day I still do not know who that was!

I now have the brilliant task of seeing the project from an alternative perspective. I was asked by the deputy head of the school if I would like to take gap year work with the school to facilitate the needs of student voice. 90% of my work is to facilitate the 85 students and 15 staff that we currently have on the *Students as Researchers* project. I have also learned how to appreciate what I had when I was at school. I hated education in the sense of going to

lessons, learning, taking exams. But I loved school – the wider sense of socialisation, communication and *Students as Researcher*. I can also now see that just because a piece of research does not provide any findings, or recommendations cannot be implemented for whatever reason, does not mean that it has all been a complete waste of time. The intrinsic value to the individuals within that group can far outweigh any findings that could ever be made. As a student I could not see that: I wanted results. However, from the perspective of an outsider I can now see that personal development is a lot more important. If the balance can be made so that recommendations can be

implemented then all the better because the balance between both will have been achieved.

I now know that I will never leave be of students as researchers because of the wonderful opportunities that it has provided me with and how it has been a part of my upbringing. If only other schools could adopt this model then education would be a better place for all.

To me *Students as Researchers* is as important as the national curriculum.



Student Involvement in School Improvement: from data source to significant voice

LOUISE RAYMOND

Currently deputy headteacher at Sharnbrook Upper School & Community College, Bedfordshire, Louise Raymond has been the driving force behind *Students as Researchers* which in four years has grown from an important, highly innovative initiative involving 15 students and 3 staff to an equally ground-breaking approach to curriculum and school renewal currently involving in the region of 90 students and 14 staff. Here she outlines the origins and development of the project and argues that it has had a profound impact on the way staff engage with students and on the wider processes of professional and organisational learning. Sharnbrook Upper School is part of Project 4 of the ESRC *Consulting Pupils About Teaching & Learning* programme, details of which appear in this special issue. Email contact: lraymond@sharnbrook.beds.sch.uk

Sharnbrook Upper School and Community College is located in North Bedfordshire – an upper school providing education for a comprehensive intake of approximately 1500 pupils, aged 13 to 18 years. There is a large Sixth Form of over 550 students.

I came to Sharnbrook Upper School 15 years ago as an NQT and, in that time, I have been privileged to be a part of a very developmental school. I have been fortunate enough to have held a number of roles of responsibility within my time at Sharnbrook and, ultimately, been allowed to take the whole area of student involvement and do 'exactly what I liked'. It was an opportunity that I have found to be extremely rewarding and exciting.

It has always been the school's aim to establish a climate that supports young people in their education in the broadest sense, to encourage positive interpersonal relationships between all members of the school and the broader community. For over ten years, the school has been involved in a school improvement project that involves groups of staff undertaking school-based enquiry and research in a variety of different areas. This model is non-hierarchical and has involved well over two-thirds of our staff and I believe it has been, by far, the most significant and empowering professional development strategy that I have seen in any school in any country.

It was interesting that there was a desire from all of these enquiry groups, some five or six years ago, to involve students in some way to gain a different kind of data. What inevitably resulted was that we found we were merely using students as a data source. When we first started to think about involving students in enquiry for school improvement, consulting students as a research data source was often an initial step and very valuable in many ways. However, there are, inevitably, limitations with this approach relating to the quality of data collected and the scope for school improvement as a result. Often, this is to do with a lack of student involvement in the design stage. A teacher-designed question is a good example of this. They often leave teachers feeling frustrated because they sense that they have not fully understood the responses that the students give. The

problem is that there is often a mismatch in student-teacher language. This can be largely avoided by actively involving students in designing the questionnaire and, crucially, in developing the questions in the first place. In this way, students effectively become co-researchers with their teachers, working together to improve their school, instead of being just consulted. Perhaps, even more important is that students feel included and that their opinions really do matter.

Figure 1 illustrates just how we have developed, over time, different approaches to working with students. All have their value and, clearly, the circumstance will often dictate the most appropriate method. However, in principle, we have moved away from asking students what they think via a questionnaire, to working with them to design the questionnaire and analysing the results, to co-researching specific areas of interest to a situation where the students own the agenda for research issues important to them.

DATA	DISCUSSION	DIALOGUE (teacher led)	SIGNIFICANT VOICE (student led)
Students as	Students as	Students as	Students as
DATA SOURCE	ACTIVE RESPONDENTS	CO- RESEARCHERS	RESEARCHERS

Figure 1

Whichever model is chosen, what is particularly important is that starting small is fundamental. It is great to empower students by asking them to provide feedback, but the reality is that there are numerous questions and answers and teachers have different styles and ways of interpreting the results. Small group interviews, getting students to really think about a few questions can really help to introduce this new way of working. This way,

quality feedback is easily identified and the process of sifting through endless questionnaire responses is avoided.

I feel very strongly that it is crucial that students are aware of what is happening. They must understand what their role is and why we need them to be involved. Students must participate because they want to. We need to be really up front about the nature of the research, the process of what we are doing and how we hope to achieve it. By teachers being honest and up front about engaging students in this way, and having the courage to say 'I don't really know where this will lead to' can gain a lot of respect from students. Students feel engaged and involved as equals from the outset. In this way, they can then begin to establish different and better relationships between their teachers and collect more honest and reflective data on how to improve the school.

As a direct result of our school enquiry work and some of the more innovative ways we began to work with students, our *Students as Researchers* project was developed and launched in partnership with Michael Fielding from Cambridge University four years ago. In essence, we trained students from Years 9 to 13 in methods of research and evaluation. Students undergo rigorous training which takes place off site. We ensure now that students who have been involved in the project before, are able to support us in the training. Staff who are involved in the project also attend this training, the crucial issue being that we are forming a new way of working and a new partnership and, as such, it is important that all those taking part in the project fully understand the sensitivities and issues that they will all be facing as the enquiry progresses.

Students As Partners In Learning

As the project has developed, we have looked to involve the more challenging students, those students who are disaffected and, of course, we have attempted to embrace the whole ability range (and I do mean, the whole ability range!) After the training has taken place, students work in small groups, usually around 5-6, focusing on areas of enquiry that are important to them. In the past, the whole student body has voted on the topics that they feel are most important. These topics have been generated by students in small groups and staff and parents. In a sense it is the *Students as Researchers* who then undertake research on behalf of the whole student body. Reports are written at the end of each enquiry and the results fed back directly to the stakeholders who need to know. Changes have happened. At Sharnbrook Upper School, I can tangibly trace how students enquiry has fundamentally impacted on school improvement over the last four years.

The project annually has involved around 30 students and 4 staff. However, this year's model has become far more ambitious and far reaching. Figure 2 illustrates how this year's model operates. As you can see, it is inclusive, the outer arrows indicating how staff and student consultants support the operation of the whole project. Each of the small boxes shows the specific area of enquiry being undertaken. Each of these involves 6-7 students and a member of staff. What is particularly significant, however, is that these enquiries are each located in different curriculum areas. The strength in the knowledge of the project across the school has enabled a greater

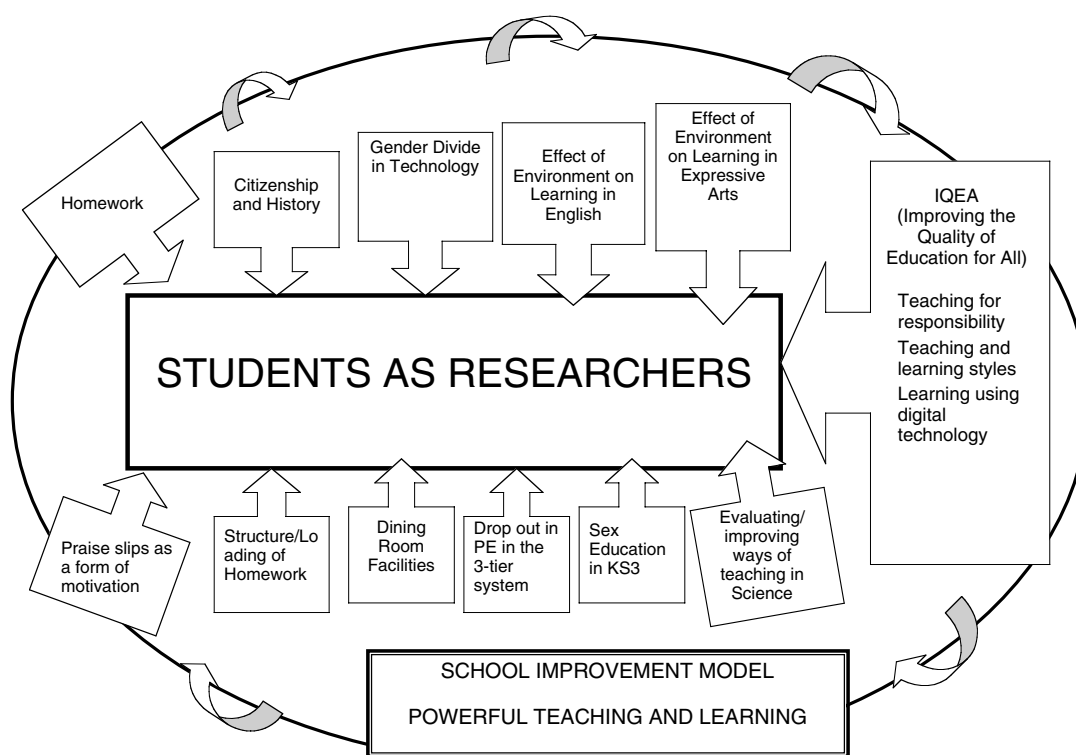


Figure 2

number of staff to be involved and to share best practice across departments.

As well as these 11 groups, you can see on the diagram, three other *Students as Researchers* groups. They work alongside our school improvement model which focuses on Powerful Teaching and Learning and, within this, students are continuing work they initiated last year looking at:

- Teaching for Responsibility
- Teaching and Learning Styles
- Learning using Digital Technology

Figure 3 shows the areas of enquiry that have been covered by staff and students over the last four years. We have never seen any topic as being inappropriate, our view being that, as long as an area of research was never designed to deliberately damage, we would always wish to run with it. In most of the areas that are listed, recommendations have resulted in real change happening in the school. External evaluation has shown how profound the impact has been on staff and students working in this way.

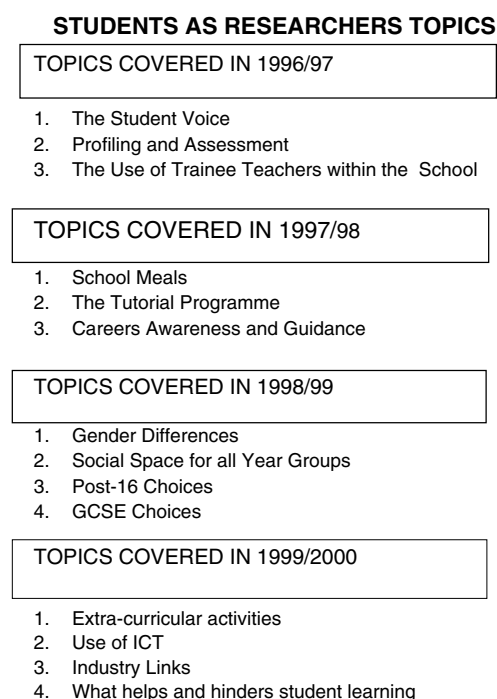


Figure 3

One of the most interesting and challenging enquiries that students engaged with in the first year was that of looking at how ITT trainees were working within the school. I remember vividly that I could not understand why students should choose to focus on such an area. However, it quickly transpired that students felt that, as a school, we were not being as honest about the trainees and how we used them in school as perhaps we could be. Quite simply, students recognised the fact that the expertise of some of these trainees, in terms of their subject knowledge, was fantastic, but that their skill in teaching was an area that, for some, was quite difficult. The students, effectively, were saying that they cared about

their lessons and they wanted to be part of the process. They felt concerned about their progress and, after all, as many of them had said 'These are *my* A levels'. The students' enquiry resulted in them making recommendations that, students who had trainee teachers, should be able to work in partnership with their normal teacher and the trainee to give feedback on lessons. At the time, I remember being extremely excited at putting these very simple recommendations into practice, but the culture and climate of the school at the time was just not right.

What has become increasingly clear to me over the years is being able to accept that very simple fact. It is important to remember that all staff within a community need to feel comfortable with these types of initiatives. We have striven at Sharnbrook Upper School to access the views of the students, parents and governors at a variety of different times, including *Students as Researchers* actually leading part of one of our Staff Days when we first set up the project to enable staff to engage, raise questions, query and challenge the principles under which the project operated. This has proved to be extremely important in terms of supporting students and staff involved in this work. Sensitivities have been broken down and we have been able, over a period of time, to share the positives that have undoubtedly arisen for staff and students engaged in this work. It has been profoundly important in terms of staff members' professional development as regards changing the way they think about their lessons and working with students in different ways to make learning better.

I was not, however, prepared to leave this particular enquiry that students engaged in relating to ITT work, and, two years later, we piloted a scheme with trainees, mentors and students and this very model now exists and is embedded in the school. We have moved from working in this way with trainee teachers to include NQTs within the programme and, indeed, this year, a pilot group of 17 staff with a variety of different backgrounds and expertise are engaged in this activity. One example I would wish to share with you involves the member of staff who has been at our school for 25 years and who, basically, has been quite impervious to a lot of professional development activity. I believe we all know these people because they exist in all our schools. Having had students observe his lessons, he shared with our staff that it had been the most profound piece of professional development activity he had ever been involved in. He found out, for example, that he always questioned to the right of the class and that students were intimidated by the fact that he walked up and down the rows throughout the lessons. Both of these things he has now addressed. Teacher observations have never picked up either of these traits.

Our aim is to produce blueprints of good practice that will give us data to enhance the learning for student and teacher in classroom based practice. The methods of collecting this data vary enormously, including students' observations, student-to-student interviews and group discussions. The evaluations have been staggering in terms of providing a rich evidence base for this work to continue.

Ironically, the sensitivities that many staff felt are gradually being broken down by the very virtue of the fact that the students are not, as some would have thought, behaving badly when asked to work in this way. They start thinking about their own learning and engaging in their

own learning in a far more productive way. In addition, they start to have ownership of their behaviour more generally in class and, on many occasions, staff have said that they have been instrumental in ensuring that whole classes are more on task because they feel that their part in more significant.

To sum up, in relation to all this work, there has been a profound change in the way that staff engage with students at this school.

- There is a far more open and honest appreciation of the value of student feedback.
- Staff working in the *Students as Researchers* project have found their own learning enhanced by working in such a different partnership with students.

- The value of student enquiry has enhanced our school improvement work.
- The involvement of students in our own school improvement programme, focusing on Powerful Teaching and Learning is taking our learning about learning even further.

I truly believe that, in essence, we are still only scratching the surface in terms of where student participation in school can really go. There is no doubt that, without a more structured and cohesive approach to student involvement at all levels, we will be, as educators, missing out on a variety of rich and important data in terms of our own professional learning.



Rehearsing for Reality: young women's voices and agendas for change

LEORA CRUDDAS

One of the crucial issues we explore in this special issue of *FORUM* concerns the importance of understanding and engaging the diversity of voices that make up the multiple realities of 'student voice'. Leora Cruddas, a teacher working as an officer in the London Borough of Newham, gives a compelling account of a highly innovative project working with group of young women who are often marginalised in an already marginalised group of students, namely those with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD). The experiences they recount and the insights that emerge from their work together are at once humbling, troubling and a source of hope for the future. Email contact: leora.cruddas@newham.gov.uk

The engaged voice must never be fixed and absolute but always changing, always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself. (bell hooks, 1994, p. 11)

Introduction

The allocation of 'special educational needs' resources targeted at supporting emotional and behavioural difficulties is consistently uneven and the pattern has changed little over time: boys receive more of the resources and support that is available (Daniels et al, 1999). With this in mind and within the context of the LEA's policy of inclusive education, a successful bid was made for funding for an action research project to investigate girls' social and emotional needs; how and why social and emotional difficulties impact on their learning; and what support arrangements would best meet these needs.

The project was funded over two years. In the first phase of the project, members of staff were seconded from a centrally-maintained LEA service and developmental work was undertaken in five secondary schools: three single sex girls' schools and two co-educational schools. A different model was implemented in the second year during which funding was delegated to the schools. The five original project schools and an additional three secondary schools were involved in research and developmental work. Each school appointed a link member of staff from the school who was released to work with young women. Different school-based models of practice emerged; however three themes run across and through all the project work: the importance of their voices in decision making and planning that affects their lives; the centrality of their constructions and representations of what they need, and the need for institutional development and change. These themes will form the content of this paper.

Students as Co-researchers: the importance of young people's voices in decision making and planning

Articles 12, 13 and 23 of the United Nations conventions on the rights of the child recognise that children and young people have the right to obtain and make known information, to express an opinion and to have that opinion

taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting them. The project team worked within this framework both in an investigative and developmental way, exploring the barriers to young women's learning and participation and investigating what they need to remove these barriers. The collaborative and dialogic nature of the research is foregrounded by the use of the inclusive pronoun 'we' in this paper.

Children and young people's right to a voice has been enshrined in social services and health legislation for a number of years. Whilst providers of services, and therefore Local Authorities, have been told to consult with 'consumers' through Quality Protects, The Early Years and Childcare Development Plans and other initiatives, this has not been true of education policy and legislation. Children and young people's right to have a voice and an active role in decision making and planning in education has, until recently, been particularly lacking.

The issue of the rights of children and young people and their participation in education is a sensitive but slowly emerging area. However, strong central government control, including detailed target setting and specification of curriculum content and teaching approaches, hinders students from making choices around their own learning. Wendy Marshall (1996) points out that 'powerful myths of liberal authority' contribute to the absenting of children's power. Further, the way we categorise 'the child' becomes increasingly confused and contradictory as children get older and become young adults.

The historic function of education as 'social control' often prevents practitioners from listening to students' own creative ideas about how systems can change and meet their needs. However, recent draft legislation (*The Code of Practice on the identification and assessment of pupils with special educational needs*) has an entire chapter called 'Pupil Participation'. This chapter is about 'the right of children with special educational needs to be involved in making decisions and exercising choice' (DfEE, 2000, p. 13). This chapter begins to articulate some of the difficulties parents may have in seeing children as partners in education. It does not, however, explore the barriers and difficulties that professionals may experience in involving

children and young people in decision making. The young women with whom we worked felt that they were not treated fairly by adults. Their views were not respected and they were made to feel of less value simply because of their age and their lack of status as young people:

Some teachers don't listen because they think we're young and don't know anything. I know that's not true.

I think it's sad that we had to have this group just to voice our opinions. Don't teachers realise that we've got opinions?

Teachers need to talk to us, not at us.

It's the way they (teachers) talk to us. We're not dirt you know.

The school needs to listen more to what we've got to say.

Young people form a historically silenced or muted group in education. Within this group, many feminist researchers have argued that young women are doubly disenfranchised, denied a voice as children and as women. We believe that there is a fundamental indignity in speaking for them or on their behalf. Within this commitment, however, there is a danger of uncritically 'essentialising' their experiences by assuming that they are free to represent their own interests transparently (Spivak, 1988). Thus, it is important to engage young women in reflecting on their experiences and enabling them to change unproductive and unsatisfying ways of interacting.

One way to find out what children and young people want is to engage them in a process of *practical* action research. This kind of research is usually carried out by practitioners and aims to improve practices and policies and involve participants in articulating their concerns and undertaking action for change. One of the challenges to the dominant model of action research is about who controls the agenda. Research agendas can be driven and controlled by lots of different groups, including the government, Local Education Authorities, academics and more recently, teachers; however, research agendas are not often controlled by young people. We hoped to include young women in the research agenda, as opposed to doing research 'to' them. The project team has a strong commitment to participatory and emancipatory research agendas that included the young women as co-researchers. Young people can engage in research in many different ways. The guiding principle of participatory action research is that it investigates realities (particularly realities that are experienced as oppressive) in order to change them (Atweh *et al.*, 1998). Recommendations about what and how to change can come from children and young people and can be used to inform policy and planning.

Thomas *et al* argue that 'consistent with the notion of inclusion is the principle that children and young people should be allowed and enabled to determine their own future, and that they should have a say in the way that their schooling proceeds' (1998, p. 64). They propose that 'if one wants to know what children want, the simple solution is surely to ask them' (1998, p. 65). This would seem self evident; however, schools are not organised in this way, operating rather under the principle of 'benevolent paternalism' (Thomas *et al*, 1998, p. 65) and the

assumption that adults know best. Some young people may not express opinions and ideas in ways that adults find acceptable. It is also the case that some opinions and ideas of young people may make adults feel uncomfortable or threatened. It is for adults to analyse and understand these feelings when they are evoked and still operate from the right of young person to a voice. The important question that we were asking during the project is how young people can be *enabled to find their voices*.

There are many creative ways to engage a process of action research for change. Much work has been done in the use of drama, art, writing and play as therapeutic tools, but there is little research in using creative spaces to bring about change. A notable exception is the work of Augusto Boal who has worked to create a 'Theatre of the Oppressed' and is most well known for Forum Theatre. Boal writes:

Freire talks about the transitivity of true teaching: the teacher is not a person who unloads knowledge... the teacher is a person who has a particular area of knowledge, transmits it to the pupil and at the same time, receives another knowledge in return, since the pupil also has his or her own area of knowledge. The least a teacher has to learn from a pupil is how the pupil learns. Pupils are different from one another; they learn differently. Teaching is transitivity. Democracy. Dialogue. (1998, p. 19).

Following Boal's metaphor of transitivity and intransitivity, conventional teaching (including teaching held in the constraints of the content-focused National Curriculum) is governed by an intransitive relationship in which products are foregrounded over processes and curriculum content is transmitted from the teacher to the pupils. This is not to undermine many teachers' creative initiatives, innovative practices and inclusive processes in the classroom.

Drawing on Boal's 'arsenal of the theatre of the oppressed' (1992), which is a set of sensory exercises and 'games', as well as other games handbooks, we used a technique called 'Developmental Group Work'. Developmental group work is transitive – the group is the centre of decision making, dialogue and democracy. The content of developmental group work, while valuable, is only a vehicle for the processes of reflection, evaluation, action and change. It gave us a way of exploring the relationship between the individual and her social and systemic contexts. It also provided a way of examining the acts that link us to others, exploring what the young women felt they needed in order to learn and how they wanted the institution to change in order to be able to meet these needs. Activities were mostly drama or arts based. A recent report by the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) recommends:

Goleman, and many others before him points to the changes and problems that can follow from difficulties in understanding and expressing our emotions. The recent report by the Mental Health Foundation confirms these concerns. There are many ways in schools of enabling young people to discuss and express their feelings and emotions. Among the most important are the arts. (Robinson, 2001, pp. 36-37)

Some writers and theorists are beginning to look at these as tools for facilitating groups to make decisions and bring

about change for themselves. Following Boal, at the heart of our developmental group work was the dual meaning of the word 'act': to perform and to take action' (1998, p.xix). The intention in our developmental group work was to create a space that liberates: 'a reflection on reality and a rehearsal for future action' (Boal, 1998, p. 9).

The Centrality of Young Women's Own Constructions and Representations

Our project was concerned with situated social practices, voice and participation. The young women talked about a continuum of social and emotional need that all young people experience. They have their own constructions, not related to the deficit discourses of 'special educational needs' or the social inclusion discourses of 'risk' that construct certain groups of young people as an essentially problematic social category requiring intervention (Bradford, 2000). While acknowledging that the discourses of 'special educational needs' and 'risk' remain part of the policy framework, we believe that they are inherently discriminatory. We share the position outlined in *The Index for Inclusion*: the approach with which these discourses are associated 'has limitations as a way of resolving educational difficulties and can be a barrier to the development of inclusive practice in schools' (CSIE, 2000, p. 13).

Integral to the idea of inclusive education is the process of increasing participation and involving students in planning and decision making. The developmental work undertaken in the project involved listening to young women and recording the barriers to learning and participation that they identified. Table I is a summary of these barriers.

Emotional problems

- Isolation
- Lack of self-confidence *Girls just go quiet and want to be left alone... when you've got problems you don't really concentrate.*

It's difficult when you don't feel like you fit in – it's lonely when you feel different.

Relationship problems

- Friendships
- Parents
- Romantic relationships
- Death and loss

Nobody really likes to be alone – it hurts.

Sometimes I would have problems. My mum would ask me and I would not say anything. I do say something now. I used to get really stressed, get headaches. Now I tell her.

When my friend started to cry and talk about her problems...that came under the category Power. We talked about power. People taking power from people...that really got to me. I think a lot of people do that to me and I really realise that.

I've got this book called 'Women Who Love Too Much'. It's really sad, yeah. They go through their whole life repeating the same process with different men. That's the problem with women.

Even if someone has died you need to keep up a relationship with them and you still feel close to them.

Academic issues

- Transitions
- Lack of opportunities for oracy
- Pressures to succeed

In Year 7 I didn't want to come to school...I was so wrapped up in my own emotions I didn't care what other people thought.... I had so many problems.

In mixed groups we can't actually talk the way we do now – the boys would probably laugh.

My family expect me to do well...everyone else has. Sometimes it's too much pressure for me.

Health issues

- Pregnancy
- Mental health
- Body image

I don't really know what happens if you get pregnant. Girls just seem to leave school.

Depression – that's important. Lots of girls get depressed and there's no one to help.

It's upsetting, getting changed in front of everyone and they're all staring at you 'cos you're fat. I'm supposed to be seven and a half stone and have a flat stomach but I ain't. I'd love to wear belly tops but I don't.

Stereotyping

- Sexuality
- Being used as agents of social control
- Domestic responsibilities
- Reputations

It is harder for girls than boys in society because if a girl sleeps around she is labelled...all kinds of names. But if a boy sleeps around...it gets positive labels.

It's like when they put you in mixed groups to work 'cos they think the boys will get on better, not muck about.

I have to be the one boiling the rice and I don't like it...no man, it has to stop.

At my age people treat you like the plague... they are not accepting. It's harder for girls... there is a new language for girls – frigid, easy...

Table I. Barriers to learning and participation.

Barriers to Learning and Participation

These barriers locate young women's subjectivities in a nexus of relationships that impact on their learning and participation and on their discursive position as learner, friend, daughter, (actual or potential) partner in sexual relationships, (in some cases) mother. These subject positions often generate competing or contradictory demands on young women: for example the domestic

demands made on them versus the pressure to succeed as a learner and do well at school. In the developmental groups, we attempted to explore how these subjectivities are created, the conflicts and competing demands of these subject positions as well as how they are negotiated within an institutional setting. Through their constant re-enactment, these positions have become so normalised that we often overlook their significance as, for example, when teachers organise groupings to support boys' learning and use girls to control and manage boys' behaviour. Subject positions therefore operate within a complex system of representations. If we are to understand and explore them, we require a different kind of language than the rationalist, technicist language of the National Curriculum with its discrete subjects (and subjectivities).

There is a long debate in feminist writing about the different ways in which men and women use language. That debate is beyond the limits of this paper. However, Cameron points out that several feminist researches have analysed the *absence* of words for certain feelings and ideas: 'those that male language makers have chosen not to name because they do not fit in with the official male worldview' (1990, p. 13); or in this case, the official (male) National Curriculum. Goleman's call for work supporting emotional intelligence and the NACCCE report's framing of the importance of young people being able to express their own ideas, values and feelings is gender blind: it neglects to look at how girls' 'speech genres' do just this.

It is therefore important to consider young women's authentic talk – their voices: the language that young women use to describe their lived experiences, how their peer groups are organised and how this is reflected in their patterns of speech. The young woman quoted above who argues for girls' separate space to avoid boys' derisory laughter is identifying different language norms within male and female peer groups. Hey's ethnographic study of girls' friendships provides a framework for understanding how girls' talk is marked by intimacy and self-disclosure (1997). Hey argues that girls' friendships provide sociologically invisible, intimate and secret cultures. It is important to explore these cultures with young women in order to free ourselves from silence and invisibility and embrace our authentic ways of communicating. It is also important to investigate how the ways in which young women talk, reflect their collaborative and co-operative learning networks. In the furore about boys' underachievement, it becomes important to investigate how girls' networks support learning and how peer group cultures play a part in shaping patterns of achievement.

However, as Cameron points out, it is not enough to construct women's voices as different; women's voices (and languages) also need to be understood in a discourse of dominance and the operations of power (1990, p. 26). Examples of this from Table 1 are: the young women quoted above who began to explore how people take power from her; the young women who recognised that women can love too much; and the young woman who began to explore how sexuality is negotiated within the patriarchal system of labelling, how the gendered labels function differently and how negative labels are used to harass women. Our developmental groups attempted to explore women's power and powerlessness, how we can be assertive, how we can change the ways in which we use

language, how we can be effective in changing the ways in which language is used – how we can change the rules of the game.

The Need for Institutional Development and Change.

Emancipatory research agendas investigate barriers and unproductive realities in an attempt to change them. Recommendations about what and how to change came from the young women who gave us very clear indications of how to reduce these barriers to learning and participation. These are summarised in Table II.

To be listened to

I felt very positive that someone actually cared about my opinion...I got to share my opinions with others.

To be heard above the boys

If a teacher has more power then you have confidence because you know the boys won't answer back or call out.

Girls have bigger problems but boys get all the help because they shout louder.

To be treated as equals

Teachers need to talk to the girls like equal human beings.

To have emotional space

There's no other space in school time for dealing with ourselves.

I like to come here- it's like an emotional space where we can work things out.

To have friends

Friends are people to share your emotions with... Someone who understands the way you understand things.

To share problems with each other

In the group we discussed our moods with teachers and how we got into trouble. When I was back in class I would just remember what we talked about and then I could keep quiet. It helped with my lessons.

To be supported by better pastoral systems

My form tutor's nice, but not all form tutors are like that.

We could do this work in PSHE .[Personal, Social and Health Education] My teacher's good.

I think we should be able to have one-to-one counselling or groupwork with outside people to talk to...

Table II. How to reduce barriers to learning and participation.

Reducing Barriers to Learning and Participation: what young women want

The main themes that emerged were therefore the need for a voice and for space (in curricular, material and psychological senses) to explore social and emotional issues – what one young woman referred to as 'space to deal with ourselves'. These agendas of/for change do not

rely on objectifying the 'normal' student against her pathological other. They benefit young women in that it becomes possible to investigate the complexity of subject positions and positioning, to understand and remove barriers to learning and participation, and to analyse and work through the complex vagaries of (female) friendships. Not least of all, they are a way providing young women with spaces (not always separatist) to speak and be heard.

It is important to recognise that there are also institutional benefits in understanding how young women's networks support learning and achievement, how social and emotional issues can be barriers to learning, how challenging behaviours are generated from unresolved emotional issues, how resources are (often ineffectively) targeted at boys' 'acting-out' behaviours and how institutional responses to girls and boys' behaviours serve to create and maintain gender differences – all issues that are very familiar to young women:

The teachers here take a lot of interest in the hyper-naughty kids...girls' emotions are tried to be dealt with but not their behaviour. With boys they work on their behaviour but not their emotions.

I reckon that most boys who are naughty have an emotional problem and they just cover it up with bad behaviour. I don't think that most teachers realise its underneath and just concentrate on their behaviour. I reckon that goes for girls as well.

Boys don't seem to be able to share their feelings like girls can. I think it's sad for boys... they don't get the help.

Developmental group work is a practical and realistic way in which schools can enable all young people to explore their emotional and social worlds in positive and constructive ways. It is also a way in which students' lived experiences can be explored and situated social practices can be investigated and changed. The Robinson Report acknowledges: 'At the heart of education is the relationship between teachers and learners and by extension the relationships that also develops between learners – young people themselves' (2001, p. 101). It is our belief that meaning and change is generated in and from these relationships – in the dialogue among our various voices. We work in the hope that the voices represented in this paper create a *dialogic* effect that will change and be renewed in the process of subsequent development of the dialogue.

Postscript: a note of warning

This kind of work operates outside what Cameron refers to as the professional rules of codified tradition that teachers are subject to if they want their language to be appropriate and authoritative (1990, p.18). This work operates in a climate in which agendas are facilitated, negotiated and

changed. In this sense, developmental group work with young women is what hooks (1994) refers to as engaged teaching: a transgressive teaching practice. Most important (and perhaps transgressive): it is exciting and pleasurable work.

Acknowledgements

A very special thanks to the young women who gave of their time and themselves and shared with us their thoughts, feelings and experiences. We hope that their voices will become the index of social change.

This paper is based on a DfEE funded project looking at issues of equity in the allocation of special educational needs resources supporting young women's social and emotional needs. A full report documenting the first year of the project is available. A second report is being prepared for publication.

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Personal Learning Planning: strategies for pupil learning

KATE BULLOCK & FELICITY WIKELEY

This article, by Kate Bullock and Felicity Wikeley of the Department of Education at the University of Bath, is an account of an evaluation of 'Personal Learning Planning', a formal approach to understanding and supporting the learning strategies of older secondary pupils. One of the benefits appeared to be that both tutors and pupils appreciated the worth of talking and listening to each other. Additional benefits were not as expected, for reasons outlined by the authors. Contact: K.K.Bullock@bath.ac.uk f.j.wikeley@bath.ac.uk

This article arises from an evaluation of a Personal Learning Planning (PLP) initiative that set out to enhance pupils' understanding of, and confidence in, learning in Year 9. The cornerstone of the initiative was a one-to-one, or small group, discussion between Year 9 tutors and their students that focused on raising awareness of the students' personal skills and abilities and then developing strategies to improve them.

Background

The notion that students should be at the heart of their own learning has received some setback in the present age of curriculum control, high stakes assessment and accountability. Although many teachers and educational support agencies remain committed to the ideal of the autonomous student learner, the demands of a set curriculum, along with the impact of visible examination scores, at all levels of schooling, have had the effect of constraining individuality and diversity in learning for many young people.

One curriculum development running counter to this national inclination was funded by an English careers guidance company. The title of the initiative, Personal Learning Planning (PLP), emphasised its intention to support and enhance students' individual learning, and to promote their self awareness and the development of their action planning skills. PLP is both a process and a product. The process supports pupils' learning through a one-to-one discussion with a tutor. This discussion reflects on the student's current achievements and the identification and articulation of their own goals for improvement. The product is an action plan, normally written by the pupil, which sets out clear targets with appropriate actions and times to achieve them by.

Inter alia, the aims of the PLP initiative included:

- motivating and increasing self confidence by involving students in planning their own learning and personal development;
- ensuring that students regularly reviewed progress and set learning and other targets with tutors;
- supporting increased academic performance; developing communication, negotiation and planning skills.

The Evaluation

The external evaluation of the PLP initiative began in May 1996 and involved twenty-six mainstream schools

and three special schools. Data collecting methods were both quantitative and qualitative. A key research strategy was to gather measures of students' attitudes about the impact of PLP at different points in time and to look for changes. Attitude measures were collected at four points in time by a survey with a sample of pupils in each school apart from one for pupils with severe learning disabilities. Responses to the attitude surveys were scrutinised for notable changes in strength of feeling.

Interviews with the PLP co-ordinator in each school, other tutors and senior managers were used to illuminate and extend the findings from the questionnaires. Finally, six mainstream schools and two special schools with different characteristics and styles of using PLP were identified as case studies. The case study schools were chosen for their diversity of outcomes in the responses to the pupil questionnaires, the location, and the nature of the school. As part of the case studies, Year 9 and Year 11 pupils were interviewed along with PLP coordinators and tutors currently or recently involved with the initiative.

Findings

Scrutiny of the data collection indicated that there were changes in students' attitude which could be attributed to the impact of the PLP initiative in Year 9. In the areas of Planning, Making Choices, Personal Understanding, Talking to People and Using the Careers Library it was clear that PLP could claim successes in meeting, at least, some of its identified objectives. However, a fundamental aim of PLP was to establish good habits and attitudes that would support lifelong learning. An important aspect of this evaluation, therefore, was an exploration of pupils' understanding of and attitude to their own learning. Here the complexity of pupil, teacher and school differences made it difficult to identify any links between PLP and learning outcomes.

The various facets of the data gathering and analysis emphasised that only a minority of students were able to appreciate the potential, wider outcomes of PLP for learning about their own learning. PLP had not promoted a concept of learning as a skill which pupils themselves have the ability to understand and improve. Most students continued to see learning as a particular task for completion and PLP as a school-oriented routine to help them make choices. Most did not grasp that PLP was designed to be an on-going process, applicable at all stages in life, and not merely a document produced in Year 9.

Pupils' attitudes and understanding were affected by their schools' approaches to, and concepts of, PLP and much could be gleaned from the observed range of practice. While most institutions recognised the benefits of dedicated time for a dialogue between tutor and pupil, only a few had successfully embedded PLP into the learning processes throughout the school, and for many tutors and pupils, PLP was still about making choices and identifying future ambitions. In general, schools were aware that they needed to move towards a more learning focussed approach and nearly all were employing some strategies to do so. However, issues significant for the effectiveness of PLP as a process for learning appeared to lie in the following areas.

Explicit Links between PLP and Learning

In most schools, the links between PLP and learning needed to be more explicit. Although the tutors frequently commented that they found the one-to-one or small group interviews a very useful way of getting to know their pupils, some did not appear to relate the dialogue to the pupils' learning processes. One school was a notable exception. Here, they spoke of having to explore different issues with individual pupils according to their circumstances and needs. Some priorities were related to academic learning while others were more personal or social learning. Getting to know their pupils had a clear and pertinent focus on a mutual understanding of pupils' learning.

In this school, the PLP co-ordinator saw PLP as a process for putting structure into the pastoral system. He wanted it ...not to be some sort of second rate social service agency, but to be looking at how the pastoral effort supports progress and the achievement of excellence in the school. Ultimately he saw a 'Progress File', co-ordinated by tutors, as the way forward. It would be a universal scheme with the ability to target those who needed more support. To achieve this, PLP had to develop from being a 'one off' Year 9 process aimed at producing a document to being much more integrated into other school processes. They were working towards developing one continuous process, preferably from Years 7 to 11 with its own 'Progress Plan' which would move away from discrete initiatives in separate years and support a whole school approach to formative assessment.

It's part of the process of us getting them to develop as people with a view of the outside world and how they fit within it and link that to how they're going on in school.

We're aiming for the kids to make the connections between what they're doing in school and what they're good at and their strengths and weaknesses and what they need to improve and so forth.

Another school recognised that learning was necessary for tutors as well as students. A one-to-one dialogue with a pupil is clearly a learning opportunity for teachers, as well as students, and needs to be heralded as such. Here, tutors felt there was a need for schools to consider effective processes for student self-assessment alongside supporting tutor skills in communicating with students for formative assessment. Tutors said they set out to help students identify their weakest subjects, the aspects of that they needed to improve and exactly how they were going to do

it – rather than pose a general question such as 'what do you want to improve?'

They [pupils] tend to say 'I must improve my homework/ do better in class/, those sorts of things, unless you pin them down and say 'What's your weakest subject?', 'Maths – well what can you do to improve that?' and then they start to think about very specific subject linked things, but we go woolly if we have wide questions.

Setting Targets

Overall, target setting was a big issue for the PLP schools. Doubly, perhaps, because it was one of the aims of the PLP process and also part of government policy which is impacting greatly on schools at the current time. In one interview, Year 9 students concluded that planning was the most important aspect of the PLP process. This was concerned with having clear goals for the future rather than a systematic approach to learning.

The relationship between goals, identified in Year 9, and current and future actions was hazy and pupils were also uncertain about what might be germane and useful targets. To the students some targets appeared very long term and vague. Some expressed concern that they were being pressurised by tutors to make decisions that they did not want to make at this stage of their lives when they realised that their thoughts about the future were very likely to change.

At the time I did my first PLP interview I was interested in becoming a computer programmer, so I had this teach yourself computer programming book which I set a target to complete. Later I actually had a re-think and I thought I was having a lot of difficulty on that and I found a career of a lawyer for more interesting, so I've given up on that target and now I'm putting my effort into hoping to become a lawyer, barrister.

Tutors were beginning to appreciate that targets needed to be short term and achievable and most schools were working towards a more immediate approach. While some schools wished to relate targets more firmly to academic progress and clear subject areas, tutors acknowledged that the process needed to be focused on the individual student. They stressed that the one-to-one interviews might involve different issues for different pupils. For example, some pupils may benefit from setting academic targets whereas, for others, the priority might be acceptable standards of behaviour or a better understanding of family and social relationships and life skills.

I'm going to try and get to school on time.

Some tutors felt that PLP gave students direction in a life planning process whilst others felt that a more explicit connection with current learning would give 'spin-offs'.

I think the life plan, the long term, whether they want to live in a city or in the country is irrelevant really. I think perhaps, it is better that they concentrate on the way they're learning and the targets that help them focus on that.

A few tutors who articulated the need for the process being more immediate than considering specific career choices, appeared unclear when pressed about how they might make the connections between short and long term

plans. In schools where there were opportunities for on-going discussion and review of the PLP initiative, a more flexible cycle of action had emerged. However, a main complaint from tutors was the lack of time to review and revisit targets. The case studies revealed that targets were set but frequently never reviewed. Unless this happened the targets became meaningless and far from acting as a motivating factor became de-motivating. Although there was a feeling amongst tutors that pupils were setting better quality targets, using them productively was a real issue.

You can't monitor them, they can't monitor them and the whole thing becomes meaningless. They set targets but nobody is doing anything about it.

Ownership

The third issue for schools was one of ownership, both of the process and the product. There was a very real tension in some of the schools between confidentiality and dissemination. One school that saw the process as a way of improving the relationship between tutors and their tutor group were very keen to create a confidential process. Although targets might be set, the ownership of those targets and any subsequent action or request for support was firmly in the hands of the student. Nothing was passed on to other members of staff or included in a subsequent document unless the student requested it. The students interviewed had a definite understanding that PLP was a personal process about themselves and sometimes sharing targets with other teachers resulted in resentment. In such schools the advantage of establishing relationships between tutors and pupils was mitigated by subject teachers not being aware of individual targets. In other schools where efforts had been made to use the PLP for action planning with subject teachers there was a concern that the final document did not reflect the range of issues discussed in the interview because of the possibility of it being accessible to others. In particular it was suggested that boys were inhibited by the chance that their PLP might be seen and ridiculed by their friends. Some schools used the plan as a presentation document which was sent home to parents and there was much agreement that the plan was used as a basis for Year 10 discussions leading to Records of Achievement.

Although most tutors saw PLP as a pupil led process, many pupils saw it as a school process with the tutors asking questions and setting the agenda. The students commented that 'the tutor asks questions' while a few tutors felt that students found it hard to talk to them. Some schools observed benefits in starting with (friendship) group discussions sharing what the students were currently doing in and out of school and identifying successes and weaknesses. Tutors thought that this set a foundation and improved the later one-to-one discussions. Students felt that group interviews with friends made for better discussions as their perceptions of each other helped identify individual strengths and skills. They saw the group interviews being about identifying key skills, but the individual interviews being about target setting and writing the document.

In enhancing learning a balance may need to be maintained. Pupil ownership implies that the use, style and content of the written plan is within their authority. Ownership by the school implies constraints of content and standards of presentation. While these raise the profile of the plan, they contribute to pupils' perceptions of it as a school-owned product and a school-directed process. The bottom line in this tension is that it may be very difficult for schools and tutors not to put some stress on the presentation of a final document which will undoubtedly be seen by parents and others and hence may be judged as a reflection of effective teaching. If the PLP is to be owned by the student then subsequent use of the document needs to be flexible, appropriate to the individual and agreed by the student and their tutor.

Conclusions

The real advantages, expressed by the tutors, about the PLP process were that they got to know their pupils better, and they perceived the process was valued by students as quality time with their tutor – a time when students' views are worthwhile and valued. There was some evidence that boys more than girls, gained more directly from the one-to-one discussion with their tutor and that lower attaining pupils also benefitted significantly.

The evidence pointed to discrepancies between the rhetoric and the reality of teachers' and pupils' beliefs and practices that contributed to the lack of understanding about learning. For example, there was disparity between the perceptions of tutors, for whom PLP was an opportunity to interact with, and get to know, their pupils at a more informal level, and the perceptions of some pupils for whom it was primarily a school requirement before making option choices. While both parties appeared to enjoy and benefit from the PLP dialogue, it seemed that both failed to make the most of the process. Pupils were not able to make the link with learning about learning. Tutors discovered interesting information about their pupils but, in general, missed the opportunity to explore the dynamics of individual pupil learning. There was little opportunity in some schools for tutors to reflect on the PLP process and their own learning in relation to it. The need for tutors' learning to mirror that in which they were engaging their pupils was stressed by a few schools. In these cases, all the data indicated that PLP was beginning to achieve its stated aims and making a significant impact in the school.

There was agreement among many tutors that the PLP systems should both become embedded in practice and permeate throughout the school, but for some pupils the applicability to other years and the links with similar initiatives were not explicit. Clearly, if learning is to be the major focus of action planning initiatives then such links between learning and the process and product need to be central to the preparation and planning from the outset. Strategies for learning are not likely to arise incidentally as a bi-product from an exercise focussed on other outcomes.

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Taking a Joke: learning from the voices we don't want to hear

SARA BRAGG

Sara Bragg is a Research Fellow at the University of Sussex where she is working with Michael Fielding on two strands (Projects 3 & 4) of the ESRC project *Consulting Pupils About Teaching & Learning*. Here she draws on some of her earlier research to ask probing questions about our willingness and capacity as adults to come to terms with voices we find it difficult to hear, let alone listen to with any degree of interest, comprehension, or sense of openness to the possibility of learning. Many of the issues she raises connect strongly with those highlighted earlier by Leora Cruddas and later on in this special issue by Elena Silva. Email contact: s.bragg@sussex.ac.uk

Accounts of 'students as researchers' or other participatory projects typically advocate such work enthusiastically and encourage others to engage in it. They cite young people's words as evidence of their motivation and sophisticated insight into their schools and their learning, and in order to illustrate the rewards of such work, for instance, in changing relationships between teachers and students, illuminating neglected issues, and helping elaborate a shared vision of the school community. They often note that one condition for success is that staff at all levels should be receptive and committed to student-led initiatives and to school-wide change. What receives less attention is the implicit contract to which students too must agree; that they take seriously the invitation to participate and speak responsibly, intelligibly and usefully. In this article, I want instead to ask how we might work with student voices that do not appear to keep their side of the bargain – those that seem incomprehensible, recalcitrant or even obnoxious. I will approach this through an illustrative account of the roots of my doctoral research on media education (Bragg, 2000) in just such responses.

My Story

In the early 1990s, I began teaching Media Studies in a sixth form college, full of optimism. Media education seemed to offer a tantalising combination of activism and intellect, along with a captive audience: Len Masterman, then the dominant figure in media education, provided a left-critical rationale for it as an emancipatory practice and indeed a 'life and death' matter (Masterman 1980; Masterman 1985, p. 6). It claimed to be relevant to young people's lives outside education, to mobilise the pleasures the media provided and which traditional school subjects often lacked. But it was also predicated on the conviction that youth audiences lacked awareness of the media's true purpose, which was (to summarise it crudely) to manufacture consent for dominant ideologies of sexism, racism and so on, and thus to reproduce social inequalities. The teacher's task was then to enlighten or 'demystify' students, primarily through providing the 'tools of analysis' (concepts and theoretical terminology) of textual

critique, by which the hidden conventions, meanings and values of media products would be revealed. Once students recognised the injustice the media perpetrated, the theory went, they would then be better placed to transform and challenge it – thus media education would usher in an era of greater equity for all. This was a weighty task indeed, yet writers such as Masterman insisted that teachers could remain merely 'senior colleagues' and 'collaborators' with their students even as they liberated them from their 'innocent' consumption of insidious meanings. They held out to teachers such as myself a glittering image of power, while denying that I would have to exercise it.

Classroom reality soon crushed my hopes. Students were bored and unmoved by my choice of subject matter – the usual suspects, like race and gender representations, positive images, the news, the concentration of media power in the hands of a few (particularly, of course, Rupert Murdoch...). Our relationships were often marked by sullen resentment on their part rather than the harmonious equality I had hoped for. They read my teaching practices as censure of their tastes, and the low grades I gave them for their essays as a dogmatic dismissal of their perspectives. Yet I felt that I didn't have any alternative within the educational approaches available to me. Ideological analysis of topics such as the news seemed to be a moral duty if I were to equip students to participate as citizens in the world around them. My negative response to their work rested on a definition of what could count as evidence of understanding and learning. Students who argued, for instance, that media portrayals of women simply reflected their innate differences from men, had to be marked down for failing to realise the constructed nature of representations. I repeatedly carried out course evaluations, but the politely phrased results only led me to rethink how I taught ('more discussions', 'less note-taking') and did not shake my fervent belief that what I was doing was, in general, morally and politically right.

Two years after I had begun teaching, I was required to offer a media-related course for the college programme of extra-curricular activities. I nominated horror films as a topic out of a vague sense that it would be popular, and

that the likely preponderance of boys in the group would allow me to 'do something feminist' around masculinity and the media. I was taken aback by its success. It often attracted as many as thirty or forty students, and assumed a kind of a ritual status for a number of them, mainly heavy metal fans in leather jackets, who would turn up early to grab the front row seats. The atmosphere was chaotic, as students crowded into the classroom, drowned out my attempts to speak, ignored my calls for discipline and subjected everything about me to fierce critical scrutiny. ('Well, look at the way you dress!' they declared scornfully when I complained about the difficulty of obtaining banned videos). They departed each week leaving a trail of chaos in their wake – sweet and crisp wrappers all over the floor, overturned and broken chairs, sexual cartoons and satanic symbols scribbled on the whiteboard – and me with mixed feelings, of both exhilaration and frustration. On the one hand, I was excited finally to be addressing young people in terms of something that mattered to them. Even my lack of control felt like a welcome change from the authoritarianism I was modelling in other classes, against my conscious intentions. On the other hand, my attempts to encourage students to reflect on their informal media experiences often foundered on the very contradictions that made the course so fascinating. Both they and I were thrilled by the subversive charge that making an excluded cultural form visible held in the context of the elite, achievement-oriented, Christian ethos of the college. Yet to take horror seriously as an object of study would betray the pleasures it offered, which lay in its illegitimacy and opposition to academic norms. Students therefore consistently refused my attempts to impose formal teaching strategies, such as worksheets, discussion, textual analysis and other established media education practices, in which I spoke to them as a teacher, rather than as a fellow fan.

Something of the flavour of our relationships can be seen in students' responses to an evaluation form I issued at the end of the first term.

Q: 'What were your expectations when you chose this option?'

A: 'To see lots of blood and people being maimed and screaming in agony as they die painfull', 'watch people getting hurt', 'lots of blood and limb extracting', 'To see dead people, people getting killed, people getting hurt shot, stabbed, eaten, crucified, raped, shagged'.

Q: 'What has been the least enjoyable part of the course so far?'

A: 'Shit discussions and no blood', 'the bit where Sarah goes on before the film', 'waffalling on at the start of films', 'her blathering on about the film giving her personal opinion which is always along the lines of sex', 'the bit where we analyse the film'.

Q: 'What could be done to improve this course?'

A: 'More tits, more gore, more internal organs up the wall', 'more women being cut up', 'more tits being cut up'.

I initially responded to these comments with a sense of shame and shock. They seemed not only to confirm my pedagogic failures, but also to constitute a direct attack on me in their uncompromising rejection of my perspectives and aspirations. However, even then their hyperbole made me doubt that they expressed what they 'really' thought about women (or about me). Nor were they a spontaneous

outpouring of raw emotion; they demonstrated a mocking awareness, phrased almost poetically, of the impact of flaunting taboos, introducing 'the body', violence and perversity into classroom discourse. They were more appropriately seen as a 'contextualised dialogue' (Edwards & Mercer, 1987) produced for a specific purpose. My research really began when I attempted to enter that dialogue and to understand what might be valuable in what they were telling me.

Throughout the course, I had insisted on discussing the films before we watched them in order to promote a more 'critical' viewing. I interpreted students' resistance to doing so as their stubborn unwillingness to consider the films from broader perspectives. Yet I was aware that my teaching was in fact frequently banal and failed to connect to their categories or knowledge. I had taught the conventions of horror films, for example, but the students knew the formulae, could recite them readily, and weren't being enlightened by going over them. I also based the course around the genre categories identified in Carol Clover's *Men, Women and Chainsaws* (1992), such as the slasher and the occult. But the students made different distinctions: 'art' versus 'gore' horror, or 'basic' versus 'psychological' – terms which were unfamiliar to me and the boundaries of which were almost impossible to establish. The problem was not that raised by other educators such as Williamson (1981/2), of a silenced knowledge that refuses the risk of teacher or peer disapproval in the classroom context; students were prepared to articulate their views, but I wasn't relating to them.

In the context of the lessons, too, students constructed themselves as fearless gore hounds who shared the power and potency of the (male) killers of the films, whilst I drew on feminist psychoanalytic perspectives that depicted male viewers as masochists identifying with the passivity and terror of the (female) victims. I presented these academic views as a neutral and abstract truth that I wanted students to 'discover'. I did not acknowledge (to them or to myself) that they served also to undermine students' identity claims and thus counter what I experienced as their intimidation of me. Perhaps therefore students had correctly identified my desire for mastery and control in the classroom when they condemned the pedagogic game of discussion as 'shit'. And in turn their trenchant denunciation of my 'personal' opinions in their evaluations rejected my 'will to power' as much as the content of what I tried to teach. The relational dynamics of the classroom were clearly far more complex than radical educators had allowed. I began to see that classroom textual analysis does not, as I had believed, import a meaning from elsewhere, that it then holds up for scrutiny. Instead it is a performance that itself constructs that meaning, momentarily and provisionally, and in relation to the specific power struggles and investments of its location.

The practice of ideological decoding is also text-focused, assuming that the most important meanings exist at the level of the individual text and are already 'within' it. I believed then that horror fan subcultures flourished because of the psychic satisfaction particular films offered, and in my teaching sought to find the ones that were most resonant for my classes. Yet I was puzzled by the fact that even when I let students choose the films we watched, they would often clamour for one they had seen and liked

before, yet at the end of the screening denounce it as 'crap'. At the time I never thought to question the links between horror and other media forms such as heavy metal or to engage students in a discussion of the meaning of the course itself. The latter issue became unavoidable later, however, when the college timetable changed. Instead of taking place in the middle of the morning, when students had to wait around for afternoon lessons, the course was scheduled after lunch when they could otherwise go home; rather than being in a central location, it took place in a remote teaching hut. Faced with a choice of activities and the relative invisibility of attendance, student numbers dropped dramatically. The course proved to be not so much a vessel that captured an authentic horror fan subculture 'out there', as I had thought, but an occasion for its construction at a particular juncture and in a particular space. I began to frame horror viewing as a context-specific practice and thus to ask about the social function of public identification as a member of a horror audience, rather than seeing it as a series of encounters with single texts.

By prioritising talk about the films, my teaching valued knowledge that could be consciously articulated and possibly held, moralistically, that analysis was self-evidently better than pleasure – particularly, perhaps, the sensuous pleasures of the body that horror provides. Students' evaluations conveyed pointedly that this was a poor strategy: to teach horror, they suggest, requires us to offer something better (or at least as good) as the experience of watching it. In the long term I began to explore alternative pedagogical strategies, such as the experience of practical media production, that offered students more affectively engaging positions of creators and producers than the often negative and carping one of media 'critic'.

In the short term, of course, I was faced with the question of how to respond to what students had written. Launching an attack on them for their sexism might jeopardise our already fragile relationship. Pedagogical strategies aimed at 'changing their attitudes' would target the comments themselves, not their function. Masterman suggested teachers could encourage an 'atmosphere of trust' in which students would 'problematise' their views in a 'mature and serious' debate (Masterman, 1985, p. 240). But in giving them the questionnaire, I had already invited them to respond as thoughtful, rational 'consumers' of the educational product that I was providing, and it was precisely this positioning that they were rejecting with relish. I opted for reading them out, straight-faced, at the start of the next term's course, during a discussion of moral panics about horror audiences. The students (a mixture of previous and first-time attenders) reacted with roars of laughter, but also with a disowning embarrassment. Several students asked if they had written particular comments, seeming both eager to find out and surprised at the same time, as though they genuinely did not know. It felt like a moment of breakthrough, since it was the first time they were really curious about anything I had said. However, I lacked a means to situate and develop it. Much later, I read Elizabeth Ellsworth's argument for pedagogies that 'reflect back a difference that makes a difference' (1997), an expression which resonated with what I had done. Here, for once, I hadn't required them to

be like me, to speak in a serious, feminist or academic voice. Instead, I had taken and repeated their own words. The denaturalising effect this seemed to have (heightened by the incongruity of my speaking them as a woman) opened a gap between the selves who produced them, and who listened to them but did not necessarily recognise themselves within them. In the process, I thought, they might have been able to reflect on their own performance of masculinity, its functions in particular contexts, even take responsibility for it – and more effectively because it was achieved through laughter rather than antagonism, on students' own terms rather than mine. They learnt something from rather than about horror, as I too came to learn from Cultural Studies perspectives on popular culture when I sought to rethink pedagogy.

In the process, and perhaps with most difficulty, I challenged my own assumption that teachers should or could make students better people, as if there are easy solutions to questions of identity, or as if teaching can offer transcendence. I came to see teaching as a more prosaic activity, yet to appreciate positively the richness of its relational dimensions. For many years I continued to interpret the relations of the horror course as essentially antagonistic. For example, someone else pointed out that that students' evaluations showed an astute awareness of what I had in fact been trying to convey; I could not see it myself. The moments I recalled were those where I felt excluded and external to their culture (their mockery of my clothes, for example) or where their resistance seemed intransigently overt. A few weeks after completing the first draft of my thesis, however, I ran into Charlie, a former student from the horror course, whom I had not seen since. Nearly seven years on, he asked me if I remembered 'Edward Dildo-Hands'. When I looked blank, he reminded me that this play on 'Scissorhands' was students' answer to my theory that knives were 'phallic symbols'. The fact that he retained a memory of this mere joke helpfully reinforced my sense of the value of the arguments I had developed in my thesis, about the importance of 'everyday' knowledges embedded within subjugated forms such as jokes, story telling or even mis-spellings. But it also made me rethink my relationship to my students. I had perhaps forgotten it because I then had no way of mobilising such in/subordinate expressions pedagogically; I interpreted them as a straightforward rejection of what I offered. Charlie made me see something I could not at the time; how students paradoxically sustained my authority as a teacher by challenging it from within, on my terms, and thereby gave me something a little more intimate than I was then able to accept from them.

Reflections

My account is not typical of student voice work. In the first place, the interpretations of students' words here are mine – I did not directly involve students in that process, or invite them to engage in further research with me. I believe, however, that it was the quality of our relationship – its intensity and its fierce ambivalence – that motivated me to seek answers to the puzzles they posed. Finding those answers was enabled by a far broader context of debate among teachers and researchers, without whom I could not have moved forward in my thinking. Thus

interpretation is always a collaborative and collective endeavour, even if only implicitly.

Secondly, it is the product of years of work in which I returned again and again to particular moments, trying to find a framework for them within which they would make sense. It is exceptional in that it was enabled by the privilege of being a full time researcher. I do not want to underestimate either the necessity or the pleasures of the straightforward in student voice work, where the outcomes of consultation and research can be rapidly assimilated into school improvements in a way that satisfies and benefits everyone. But the pressures of needing rapid results may lead us to listen most readily to voices that make immediate sense. I want to make a plea to take our time with the anomalous, to allow what doesn't fit or produces unexpected reactions in us to disrupt our assumptions and habitual ways of working – because I believe that it is from these that we may, in the end, learn the most.

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Participatory Research in Schools

PERPETUA KIRBY

In a wide-ranging overview of participatory research with and by young people Perpetua Kirby raises and helps us to think through a number of key issues relevant to young people as researchers and the kinds of partnerships with adults that are likely to be fruitful and empowering of all those involved in the process. Her wide-ranging experience as a research consultant, working with children and young people mainly in the voluntary sector and local authorities, lends an authenticity and experiential weight to her observations and recommendations. Email contact: kirby@pkrc.freeseerve.co.uk

Research has long focused on children and young people, but little has explored children's own accounts of their everyday lives and experiences. Traditionally children have been observed, measured and tested (for examples of traditional methodology see Greig & Taylor, 2000), and child research has frequently relied on the views of adults (particularly parents and teachers) rather than the children themselves. As Morrow & Richards (1996) commented, there 'are so few attempts to understand children's lives 'in their own terms', and taking children's own words at face value, and as a primary source of knowledge about their experiences'. Recently there has been a shift in approach and methods used which enshrine a respect for children's competency to take part in research. This reflects a change in theories of childhood in which children have become seen as valid social actors in their own right, rather than simply as 'developing adults' (James & Prout, 1990).

Child-focused research using participatory methods is commonly referred to as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) or Participatory Appraisal (PA), and it is seen as much as a methodology or approach, as a set of research methods or techniques. This type of research is conducted with children and young people. It challenges the power imbalance between child and adult and uses age-appropriate techniques that enable their participation (Boyden & Ennew, 1997).

As well as involving children and young people more fully as research respondents in PA, there has been a far more recent movement to involve children and young people in both designing and conducting research (Kirby, 2001; Fielding, 2001; Dyson & Meagher, 2001; France, 2000; Kirby, 1999). Young researchers (also referred to as 'student researchers'; Fielding, 2001) can take part in each of the many stages of research (such as setting aims, choosing and designing methods, fieldwork, analysis and write-up and dissemination). Sometimes they are involved in helping adult-led research, in an advisory role or by undertaking one or a few stages of the process. In other projects workers support young people to conduct their own research, when they usually get involved in many more of the stages. Less frequently, adults and young people work in collaboration to undertake joint research, although more of this kind of research is needed. In all instances the young researchers require training and support and it is important to ensure the research design

meets the capacities and interests of those involved (for full discussion see Kirby, 1999, and Worrall, 2000).

Participatory research is carried out in many contexts. This paper explores the use of participatory research in schools – including both adult-conducted PA and research involving young researchers.

Participatory Research in Schools

Research in schools is most often undertaken by outside researchers, teachers or other educational professionals. Where research is adult-led there is plenty of scope for this to be done in a participatory way that respects the contribution of children. In some instances research in schools (both primary and secondary) has involved children more fully as young researchers (e.g. Fielding, 2001; Cuninghame et al, 1999, Warren, 2000; De Winter et al, 1999; HAYS and Kirby, 1998). It has been used as a method of encouraging student participation in school decision-making, as part of their formal or informal education, and as a commitment to ethical and democratic research practices.

Advocates of participatory practice view children as active participants in their own learning. Taking an active role in school research strengthens the potential for children to take responsibility for themselves and others in their school community, and helps encourage them to be active citizens. The role of schools in citizenship education has become recognised as important. In order to help children to feel empowered to speak and take action the Council of Europe's (1985) recommendation on Human Rights in Schools identified the need for a supportive environment:

Democracy is best learned in a democratic setting where participation is encouraged, where views can be expressed openly and discussed, where there is freedom of expression for pupils and teachers and where there is fairness and justice. (Council of Europe, 1985, cited in Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000)

Those who have been involved as young researchers are often motivated by an interest in helping their community. With the right support, they can gain a number of personal skills (such as computing and inter-personal communication), knowledge about research, the topic being studied and associated issues such as how decisions are made. The experience of doing research encourages dialogue with their peers and adults, and helps initiate

future collaboration. Many go on to take an active role in their communities (including further research work) and help effect organisational and social change.

For teachers involved in research there is a potential conflict between their role as a teacher and that of a researcher. The first is an established position of power, which includes the education and development of young people, imposing decisions and maintaining discipline. A researcher is classically expected to be a detached and impartial observer, encouraging voluntary rather than enforced participation, and records rather than challenges opinions. The participatory researcher working with young researchers demands a further redefinition of their role, where one shares knowledge and facilitates young people's critical awareness, but does not impose views and ideology.

The participatory researcher engages in dialogue with young people, recognising the valuable contribution that both have to make, and building relationships between the two. This demands that adults (including teachers) involved in participatory research need to feel able to work jointly with students, be open and honest with them, work flexibly and be willing to have their existing methods of working challenged. At a recent one-day conference at Sussex University for (primary and secondary) teachers and student researchers, both were treated as equal participants; they were expected to engage in activities together, they were asked to consider what teachers and students could each learn and gain from the research projects, and to consider the relationship between students and teachers (for example, both were asked to say how much they agreed or disagreed that 'students need to respect their teachers, not like them').

Participatory Research Methods

Too often research with children and young people still relies on questionnaires and traditional interview methods. Even where young researchers have been involved in conducting research they typically use these established methods. There is scope for more use of participatory research methods by both adult and young researchers.

Over recent years the development of qualitative and participatory research methods for children and young people has enabled them to express their views and experiences using familiar means of communication, many of which they use in their everyday lives. These tend to rely less on just formal methods of talking (such as traditional interviews) and instead include more creative and visual techniques, which help them to discuss their experiences and views in an interesting and fun way, and build on their existing capacities. These include drawing, photography, email, role-play, visualisations (such as mapping and time lines) and group work (Clark & Moss, 2001; Kane, 2000; Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; Johnson et al, 1998; Boyden & Ennew, 1997; Johnson, 1996). These methods produce symbolic means of communication, but also enable and encourage them to express themselves verbally. The choice of techniques will depend on a number of factors, including the children's age, their capacities and language skill levels, their interests, plus the time and resources available and whether the interview is one-to-one or in a group. Young researchers themselves can be usefully involved in developing innovative and

creative methods, and helping to choose appropriate language that their peers will understand.

Examples of Participatory

Research methods:

Seasonal time line

Draw a line for a period of time (eg a year, or since you arrived in this school) and ask the young people to indicate what they regularly do at different times of the year (eg where do you hang out with your friends in winter and summer) or what they have done during a fixed period of time (eg since the term started). Time lines can also be used for action planning. Drawings or pictures can be added to the time lines to illustrate the points being discussed (eg houses – to indicate moves, smiley/sad faces – to indicate how felt, etc).

Images

Show images (photos, magazine pictures, etc) of different types of young people, pictures of places and/or items, and ask the young people to say which they most and least identify with and why (eg which photos best depict your school). An alternative is to ask a child to draw around the body of another lying on a large piece of paper and then stick on images that they identify with themselves (eg 'things I like about myself', 'things I don't like' and 'things I'd like to improve'). The children can search for images to include from magazines, the internet, etc.

Role play

The young people can act out the types of dialogues they have with different people in their lives (eg young person with a policeman, a teacher or parent). The role play provides a good basis on which to discuss and they types of interaction they have with others, their perceptions of others and how they think others view them.

Ethical Practice

There are important ethical considerations when conducting any research and some that are specific to research involving children and young people. It is the researchers' responsibility to assess the impact of the research on the children and take responsibility for the effects of research. The primary consideration is that the participating respondents have a positive rather than negative experience, and they do not feel anxious, upset or apprehensive. Alderson (1995) provides a useful summary checklist of questions to consider when undertaking research with children. She suggests making an 'Impact on Children' statement for each research proposal to examine the effects of the research on those children participating in the research and other children affected by the research findings. This is as important for young researchers to do as it is for adult researchers; there is often too much emphasis on peer research being positive for the participating young researchers and too little on how this will impact on the many young respondents that they research.

Ethical practice demands that researchers treat respondents respectfully. This challenges not only existing research practice but also wider social roles, in which children are perceived as passive recipients rather than active participants. Even where researchers are respectful,

sometimes others in the research setting are not (Hurley, 1998):

We have carried out work with groups in schools, prisons and in government offices where people of all ages were being treated disrespectfully by those who were in positions of power over them. (Hurley, 1998)

Consent for school children to participate in research is usually first agreed by adults. Whilst parents and professionals have a duty to protect the children from being over-researched and being involved in studies that will offer no benefit (or even harm), this type of protection can be exaggerated and lead to exclusion. Ideally, both the adults and children will be provided with information about the research and will together discuss whether it is worthwhile. This demands that researchers produce age-appropriate information and that teachers and/or parents have the time and commitment to discuss the research with the children.

Morrow & Richards (1996) reported that once researchers have gained consent from schools (or others) they 'may feel unwilling to jeopardise their research project by asking the children explicitly for their 'informed consent''. Research in schools provides many advantages for an outside researcher – once they have jumped the numerous hurdles of gaining access – because they have a captured target population and teachers helpfully ensure children attend an interview or complete self-completion questionnaires. The danger is that researchers will not work as hard to check that the children volunteer to take part (rather than being volunteered), or ensure they are making an informed choice and are enabled to say they do not want to take part.

Consent should not simply be agreed at the beginning, but is best viewed as a process that continues throughout the research contact. A child should be able to withdraw their consent at any time, for a rest, to miss a question or to stop completely. It can be hard for a child to tell an adult or peer that they no longer want to continue, so the researcher will need to be sensitive to visual and verbal cues about whether the child wants to stop. At the beginning of the interview children should be told that they can stop or rest, and encouraged to practice how they will say if that is what they want (e.g. holding up a STOP sign).

Dissemination and Action

Participatory research is conducted with and for the benefit of those being researched. It is important therefore that children and young people feel some ownership of the research; how much will depend on their level of involvement. It should not be assumed that their participation stops as soon as they have expressed their views. Respondents can be involved in the interpretation of their own data (e.g. commenting on the photographs they have taken) and young researchers can be involved in data analysis and write up (although this can prove difficult, as it is complex and frequently perceived as boring), the dissemination of the findings and campaigning for change. Where possible the respondents and other young people should also be informed about the research findings, for example using leaflets, posters or a colourful booklet.

Adults are in a position to help initiate action from the research. This requires a commitment to learning and

changing practice, and mechanisms for informing the relevant audiences about research findings. Adults who control research knowledge are in a powerful position to censor or selectively disseminate findings. For example, in one school some staff were unhappy with student researchers' research findings, which critiqued teacher-pupil communication, and as a result they refused to display the posters that summarised the research (Cunningham et al, 1999). Academics gain more career benefits from publishing in academic journals than disseminating their findings to teaching professionals and students, and there is a danger that they prioritise the first.

Conclusion

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified by the UK in 1991) and the Children Act 1989 both signalled an increased concern for children's welfare and respect for listening to children's views. Research has reflected changing legislation and has been shifting its focus on to children as subjects rather than objects of research. This emphasises researching with children in appropriate ways, in an attempt to understand their own social world. This demands that researchers recognise the power that adults have over children, and attempt to reduce this imbalance throughout the research process – from choosing what to research, in design and implementation, to dissemination and action – and are sensitive to their needs and vulnerabilities. Research itself is a social intervention; how it is undertaken reflects social relationships and affects what impacts will be achieved.

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Supporting Teachers in Consulting Pupils about Aspects of Teaching and Learning, and Evaluating Impact

JOHN MACBEATH, KATE MYERS & HELEN DEMETRIOU

John MacBeath, Professor of Education at the University of Cambridge, Kate Myers, Visiting Professor at Homerton College, Cambridge and Helen Demetriou from the Research Unit at Homerton College, Cambridge offer us a preliminary set of reflections on their current research project which seeks to develop new ways of supporting teachers and pupils working more openly and collaboratively in the development of teaching and learning. Key amongst their suggestions is the importance of encouraging a shared language amongst both students and teachers that enables them to talk about teaching and learning. Their work comprises Project 2 of the ESRC *Consulting Pupils About Teaching & Learning* programme, details of which appear at the end of this special issue. Email contacts: jecm2@cam.ac.uk km304@cam.ac.uk had24@cam.ac.uk

The concept of pupil voice is one that has enjoyed a growing currency in recent years in the United Kingdom. It stems, in part, from a recognition of how little we have done in the past to value their viewpoint. It is, in part, a response to a changing social climate in which young people are less willing to be taken for granted. It may in part be because children are physically becoming adults while still in their middle years of schooling. It stems in large part, however, from the initiatives taken by schools to test the waters and discover that listening to pupils does not lead to a dangerous place. Instead we find that children and young people prove to be generous commentators and insightful critics (MacBeath, 1999).

A decade ago Michael Fullan posed the question 'What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered?' (1991, p. 70; in Rudduck & Flutter, 2000, p. 81) alerting us not only to our failure to listen intelligently but also the radical cultural change that might ensue. It assumes that teachers genuinely perceive 'the pupils' world as worth becoming engaged with' (Sleeter & Grant, 1991, p. 67; in Rudduck & Flutter, 2000, p. 87).

The case for pupil voice may be advanced on a number of grounds. Its inherent justice, as a human right, or more pragmatically because it improves teaching and learning, school ethos and leadership. Stenhouse (1975) claimed that students will do better in school if they are treated with respect as learners, communicated through teachers listening to students and demonstrating that they are prepared to take students' ideas seriously. As long ago as 1938, Dent argued that young people 'have a personal interest in their education, something to contribute to its

problems and a point of view we should treat with greater deference' (1938-9, p. 389; in Rudduck, 1999, p. 8).

'Schools seem to have changed less than their students have done', argues Jean Rudduck (1998, p. 133-4). However accomplished as social actors in their own world (James & Prout, 1997; in Rudduck & Flutter, 2000, p. 81), pupils still often lack the power to influence the quality of their lives (Mayall et al., 1996, p. 207). This despite the earlier maturation of young people and the virtual and designer society in which they grow up, treated as priority consumers by corporate agencies.

Schools which have acknowledged this have found that pupils' views can make a substantial contribution to classroom management, to learning and teaching, to the school as a social and learning place (MacBeath et al, 2000).

Somehow educators have forgotten the important connection between teachers and students. We listen to outside experts to inform us, and, consequently overlook the treasure in our very own backyards, the students. (Soo Hoo, 1993, p. 389)

Soo Hoo goes on to make the case for students being treated as a resource in school restructuring in developing planning, monitoring and evaluation (see Rudduck, 1998, p.135). The most common forum for this is the School, or Pupil Council. Pupils often view this, however, as a token gesture (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001) and staff are often happy to let the Council deal with matters that do not intrude into the school's core business of learning and teaching.

There is a pupil council but the headteacher comes to the meetings so you really can't say what you think, well you can, but he always says you're wrong.

We do get a say and they do listen, but not necessarily anything is done about it. It's as if they're trying to prove they're listening but they don't pay attention to what we think. (MacBeath & Mortimore, 2001, p.78)

Given latitude to contribute beyond these implicit or explicit boundaries, however, pupils may demonstrate a maturity and insight of value to the school:

... the agenda is likely to be expanded as pupils and teachers become used to the idea that pupils have worthwhile things to say about school organisation and learning. (Flutter et al., 1999, p. 32)

Expansion of the agenda can take a school on a journey beyond the pupil simply as data source for someone else's decision-making, into being actors on their own behalf. Fielding (2001) describes four developmental stages, from students as a data source to students as active respondents to students as co-researchers and then researchers in their own right, initiating inquiry, taking the lead, demonstrating the capacity to be independent researchers of their own learning contexts.

Treating students as researchers in their own schools and classrooms surpasses the boundaries of formal Councils which may simply be a way of containing voice within parameters of time, place and representative advocacy. Embarking on the journey through the Fielding (2001) taxonomy is the challenge confronting schools, many of which have evinced a growing interest in pupil voice but allied with considerable caution about where this might lead. Our awareness of schools' interest and our growing knowledge of groundbreaking initiatives in some schools provided the impetus for the Learning and Teaching Network.

Aims of the Project

Working with a group of schools as part of a collaborative network we set out to:

- broaden our understanding of the ways that consulting pupils can contribute to the goals of enhancing their disposition to learn and engagement with learning
- enhance teachers' confidence and technical confidence in the processes of consultation and evaluation
- bring together existing approaches of consulting pupils on aspects of learning and to build a toolbox of strategies which can be used in different school contexts and with pupils of different ages
- develop a parallel collection of approaches to evaluating the impact of small-scale school-based initiatives on pupils and their learning
- identify critical moments in the process of consultation and propose ways of dealing with sensitivities and dilemmas

The Schools

Nine schools are involved in this project, selected on the basis of their interest and/or prior experience in working with pupil voice. Two are primary schools (ages 5-11) and seven are secondary schools (11-18) representing Wales, Scotland and England. Each of these nine schools brought

to the project different histories and contexts, varying prior experiences and expectations of pupils' role.

Caldecote Primary School: The head teaches Year 5 and 6 pupils helping them to become more skilled evaluators of their own learning, working in pairs to assess and support one another, reviewing work, identifying for themselves support needed and methods of working that are most effective. Building on pupils' growing confidence and facility with self-evaluation, the school has moved progressively towards a more active and vital form of voice. Pupils are involved in appointments of new teachers and, it is planned, to give them a more active role in shaping the curriculum.

Fulfen Primary School: The headteacher has challenged staff and pupils to think more critically about learning. Colourful posters around the school pose the question 'What did you learn in school today?' and staff are encouraged to routinely quiz pupils about their learning. With this question built into the cultural wallpaper, pupils are now volunteering information themselves and posing the same question back to adults.

Falmer High School: Student council meetings provide the forum for in-depth discussions about school issues and eliciting new ideas. Discussions have been followed by constructive suggestions from pupils on how to tackle problems, while new ideas proposed have included the setting up of a school radio station, out of hours study support activities and charity events.

Langdon School: has both a school council and year council. Some pupils are also representatives on youth parliament and members of National Children's Bureau. Pupils are also routinely consulted through mini-tutorials, questionnaires, discussion and group work and an ICT users group discusses ideas for improving facilities. Pupils are consulted about the school development plan and play an active role in organising conferences.

Pen-y-Dre High School: has a school council which has worked with specific departments on the evaluation of learning and teaching. The Science Faculty has developed questionnaires on teaching and learning and invites discussions with students on preferred teaching approaches. The Maths faculty consults students on the effectiveness of numeracy provision in year 7 and the geography department also carries out lesson evaluations.

Richmond School: encourages student feedback during and after lessons. A *Thinking Skills* development programme is in progress and sixth formers review and discuss their progress with teachers. Student councils are involved in policy development, including equal opportunities, health and safety and drugs policy.

Sandringham School has a history of involving students in the evaluation of learning and teaching, having played a lead role in the European 101 schools Project on self-evaluation. Pupils play an active role in reviews of teaching and learning styles and curriculum and give a report back annually at the Teachers' meeting. All teachers appointed are interviewed by a student panel.

Sarah Bonnell School: Students' opinions are canvassed by different means, using visual display, drama and role play, as well as more conventional questionnaires. Ideas about the school are conveyed through photographs, showing areas of the school, for example, those in which students feel safest from bullying.

St Kentigern's Academy: A wide range of ways of canvassing pupil opinion are used, basing these on the Scottish national self-evaluation guidelines '*How good is OUR school?*' The performance indicators contained in this document are used both as a basis for self-evaluation questionnaires and teacher-pupil discussion. Pupils give feedback on out-of-hours provision and play an active role in reviewing and restructuring provision.

The Research Approach

Schools were asked to provide an attitudinal baseline at the beginning of the study through a pupil questionnaire containing a set of items common to both primary and secondary schools. These contained items on learning and teaching including questions such as:

- Pupils in this school have a say in making decisions
- My teacher tells me when I am doing well
- Pupils help one another with their learning

The questionnaire is double focus, asking for two responses to each question, one in terms of 'your school now' and one 'importance for you'. The gap measure between ideal and real is there not as a data source for teachers to do something about but as a tin opener, a starting point for dialogue.

The schools are visited by the three members of the research team and come together four times a year to report back on progress and exchange ideas. Where possible, teaching sessions and group discussions between pupils and teachers have been video recorded, providing short edited sequences to play back at network meetings as well as being transcribed for the purposes of discourse analysis.

The data being gathered is focusing on the nature and process of consulting. How is it experienced by teachers and pupils? How genuine does it feel to students as opposed to being seen as tokenistic or ritualistic? How do schools and teachers use deeper ways of probing children's learning and thinking? What tools and strategies do they use which might profitably be shared with others?

Data Gathered on the Process of Consultation

- on the approaches which prove to be the most incisive in probing pupils' thinking about teaching and learning
- on ways of making the approaches more penetrating, reliable and valid
- on difficulties encountered in the process of consultation and how these were tackled
- on teachers' confidence in using approaches from the toolbox to elicit pupil perspectives.

At the first network conference participants shared different strategies they were already using and began the process of filling the toolbox. Four basic approaches were identified – talking, writing, drawing and enacting. The question it raised was whether pupils' opinions were undervalued due to the medium used to elicit their thoughts. The medium used was seen as closely related to key factors such as age, gender, context and history.

Age factors constrain and liberate. Very young children are hampered by their reading and writing abilities but less inhibited in their expression of feelings. With young children confidentiality is more difficult to ensure but

talking with a trusted familiar teacher may be more facilitative than with a more neutral stranger. Methods that work particularly well with young children are visual – drawing and painting, for example – but require follow-up dialogue to probe for meaning beneath the visual form. A sense of fun may be important for younger children, together with a mature 'grown up' aspect to the discussion, helping children to feel important and valued. With older pupils the emphasis may be more on the serious nature of the discussion, contextualisation its purposes and parameters.

Gender also plays its part. One of our network schools is an all-girls school east of London. We attended and recorded a lesson in which students experimented with different ways of exploring their learning through role play, simulation, direct teaching, diagramming and picturing. Girls admitted to being much freer to role play, to 'be silly' in the absence of hyper-critical boys. Speaking out, offering your opinion, and writing are also gender sensitive.

As our earlier comments about pupils' councils illustrate, the context of pupil voice is all important. Who is present? How carefully do you need to tread? What is the hidden agenda? What are the parameters and expectations? What and how much are people able to hear? As outside interviewers discover it may be a long journey into trust and confidentiality. It raises questions of individual and group interviews, the pluses and minuses of the peer group effect set against the potentially intimidating context of the individual interview. Choice of venue – the power of place – is a significant consideration, as we found in an earlier study interviewing children in their own home or in the school (MacBeath et al., 1986). In whichever context information is elicited from the pupils, they need to feel relaxed enough to respond thoughtfully and openly to the issues presented to them, not felt to be judged and to believe that their responses will be taken seriously.

All schools and all students have a prior history of consultation or non-consultation. They may suffer from questionnaire fatigue, from a history of their views being sought and then ignored, or perhaps having internalised a view that they really have nothing to contribute. Alternatively they may bring a rich store of prior experience, verbal and analytic skills, a self-confidence and trust in adults. In one of our nine schools we remarked to the headteacher how open, mature and sophisticated these ten and eleven year olds were in the expression of their views. 'They didn't just come that way, you know', she replied, pointing to a long process of developing in her pupils the trust, the skills and the language in which to talk about learning.

The more these factors are taken into account the more likely the finding that:

young people are observant, are often capable of analytic and constructive comment, and usually respond well to the responsibility, seriously entrusted to them, of helping to identify aspects of schooling that get in the way of their learning. (Rudduck, 1998, p. 136)

All of these factors have a bearing on how we interpret and use results of pupil voice. For us, as researchers, they are

primarily a data source, and the data have to be treated with caution and circumspection, bringing to bear our reflections on context and expectations, the often temporal nature of comment particularly for young children (what went before and how has this recent experience coloured memory and feeling?). How authentic is voice and how do we know?

The more we can feed back our findings and seek further clarification from those who supplied them the safer the ground we may be on. When individual confidentiality is not at issue we may seek help from teachers, headteachers, or parents in providing the interpretive frame.

In summary we underline the important considerations of:

- age (taking account of pupils' competence and their attitude to the medium)
- ethical issues and how these differ with age and with the medium of the consultation
- whether the information is consciously or unconsciously given by the pupils
- whether pupils' ideas are authentically interpreted by adults
- whether pupils know what happens as a result of the consultation (feedback and action)
- what language for talking about learning pupils have

Evaluating Impact

As well as working with teachers to develop a strategic toolbox we also have to assess the impact of the work. Is pupil voice a nice idea or does it genuinely and demonstrably have an impact on achievement and capacity?

In the relatively short life of the project we do not expect, or set out, to find a before and after added-value measure in pupil attainment. We might expect to see such effects in the longer term, or perhaps they might need to wait for evidence of what young people did on leaving school and on whether their school experiences and their self-assessment skills paid off in higher education or employment. We can, to some extent, measure attitudes in the short term and we plan to do that through the use of questionnaire, interview and observation. What we are expected to do by our commissioning body (ESRC) is to provide evidence of impact. Has our study, and the assembling of a teacher-friendly pupil-friendly toolbox, had an effect on the quality of learning and teaching in the school? Has it helped to strengthen and deepen the learning culture and how will we know? Are children and young people more self-confident and critical learners and how will they tell us? And can we say with confidence that there is an embedding within the school culture an organisational memory and intelligence, (McGilchrist, Myers & Reed, 1998) providing the social capital for generations to come?

Some Preliminary Findings

These are ambitious targets for a short term project and we would be foolish to believe that we can do more than provide proxy measures for such outcomes. An important outcome for us is to share what we are learning, not only with the participating schools but with the wider educational community.

The importance of listening to pupils has been doubly underlined by the experience of the participating schools, in some cases exceeding our expectations of what children can do and what teachers can do to provide the climate for that to happen.

We have become acutely aware of the importance of language and the need for children to have a conceptual vocabulary not only to articulate their views but to be able to recognise them. It means teachers themselves having that vocabulary and acquiring the expertise to make it accessible to their pupils.

We have witnessed (and captured on video) the reflective quality of children's approach to issues when the classroom climate is such as to promote thinking. The video provides the visual evidence of children searching for meaning, patterns of eye movement that might provide a rich source of data for neurolinguistic programmers. Accompanying this we can see, hear and 'feel' the quality of teachers' reflectiveness, in tone of voice, in the nature and inflection of questioning, the thinking out loud, the invitation to contribute through creating the space and confidence for voices to be heard.

We have seen the impact of current government policy and the varying responses of schools. The target setting agenda has had a profound impact on every school and much of our discussion with young people has been around their targets – targets set by teachers, targets relayed by teachers from higher levels, targets set by pupils themselves. There are targets which are limited to attendance and task completion, targets expressed simply in terms of a single grade (a C or a B) criterion-referenced targets more concentrated on skills but, as yet, little evidence of targets which refer to 'deep learning' (Entwistle, 1989). We hope that we may, together with teachers, help pupils to set targets which are truly about learning to learn more effectively.

Some of the issues raised by pupils so far include:

- *Talking about learning:* With appropriate support and context pupils enjoy sharing ideas and talk over their learning:
- *I liked it when we talked about the things we were going to do, it sort of made things easier, I knew what we had to do...I thought, I can do this. (boy, 10)*
- *Peer learning:* Pupils enjoy working with their friends but as they develop greater critical insights into their own learning they are more careful in choosing people to work with who have complementary skills and with whom they can establish a congenial relationship. *Jenny is my friend but I like working with Theresa because she knows how to help me with my maths. (girl 10)*

Sometimes, teachers interrupted the flow of pupils' work together in order to address the whole class.

like Tony and I, we're working away and getting on great and the teacher says 'put down your pencils'. That really irritates me.(boy 11)

In an open and reflective climate, pupils were able to feed this back to the teacher who then engaged them collaboratively in how to deal with such issues.

Pupils have clear ideas about the ways in which they liked to be assessed, seeking more formative assessment, helpful comment rather than generalised praise, less

emphasis on grades and a strong plea for abolition of the red pen.

Pupils expressed widely differing views about their parents' involvement in their work and the nature of that involvement. This not only varied with age but within a class of peers whose differing views on the matter differed formed part of a useful dialogue with the headteacher in future policy direction.

Next Steps

The project is still at an early stage of development. By spring 2002, further interviews, questionnaires and observations will have been conducted, further interventions made, and we hope then to report on the impact of pupil voice on teaching and learning and on a school and classroom culture which treats children and young people as producers of learning rather than consumers of teaching, researchers rather than simply the researched.

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‘Walking on air’? Pupil Voice and School Choice

ISOBEL URQUHART

In what is in many ways a distressing piece of research, Isobel Urquhart, Joint Language Co-ordinator and senior lecturer in psychology at Homerton College, Cambridge, helps us to understand, in much more detail than bald statistics allow, the human realities of the current United Kingdom system of young people and their families ‘choosing’ their preferred secondary school. We have known for some time that such choice is a misnomer; what we have been less publicly aware of is the depth and complexity of student responses to the realities of disappointed expectations revealed in this research. Email contact: ibu20@cus.cam.ac.uk

It's two days since 11-year-old Frances heard she'd got into the secondary school she was hoping for, and she's still walking on air. (Guardian Education, 20 March 2001)

By celebrating the successes of those individuals who achieve places at popular and high achieving schools, press reports often draw readers' attention to the emotional highs of choosing a secondary school. And yet, for many children, the experience of choosing a school is one of protracted anxiety and ultimate disappointment that can last from November of Year 6 to the start of secondary school the following September. This period of extended emotional turbulence runs much deeper than popular accounts suggest. It affects, so their teachers fear, children's motivation and achievement during their last year of primary school and continues into secondary school. So, while the outcome might be happy for some, such as Frances, for many other children, it is not. 'In short, for many children there is a world of difference between *making and getting* a choice.' (Reay & Lucey, 2000). It is the experience of those children who were offered places in schools that were neither their first, second nor even their third choices that has been the object of this study.

What has helped teachers and others to respond effectively to some of the difficulties children experience as learners has been a growing understanding of the importance of listening to what pupils have to tell us about their experiences, and what they think will make a difference to their level of commitment to their learning. As Pomeroy (1999) explains, 'as the recipients of policy-in-practice, they possess a knowledge of the educational system which is not necessarily known to teachers, parents or policy-makers.' What children are uniquely positioned to tell us about are the forms of teaching and learning that they find challenging or limiting. They are also able to let us know how they experience the systems and relationships that create the 'conditions of learning' within which their status as learners and members of the community are structured. (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). Moreover, as Rudduck et al (1996) emphasise, 'it is the less effective learners who are most likely to be able to explore aspects of the system that constrain commitment and progress; these are the voices least likely to be heard and yet most important to be heard.'

We set out to discover what children who had not been successful in gaining places in their chosen secondary

schools could tell us about their experiences at the time of transfer from primary to secondary school.

The Research Study

Difficulty in getting into a preferred secondary school is not a situation to be found in all LEAs. We were asked to look at the issue in an inner-London LEA where secondary school choice was a real issue and where primary teachers felt that the experiences of rejection was potentially damaging to pupils' motivation and engagement in their final year in primary school.

The project ran from April 2000 to April 2001 and was commissioned by an LEA with a relatively large number of pupils who did not obtain places in their preferred secondary school. There were two phases to the project. The first phase ran from April 2000 – July 2000 and took place while children were in Year 6. It involved semi-structured interviews with 22 predominantly working class Y6 girls and boys. The children, from different ethnic backgrounds, came from three primary schools in different parts of the LEA. Children disappointed by the results of the admissions procedure were selected by their teachers and were invited to take part in the project. In each school, 6-8 children were interviewed in same-sex pairs, together with one pair who appeared to be satisfied by the admissions procedure. At the end of the first phase, findings were reported to the schools' Head Teachers, and to the LEA. The second phase of the study took place between October 2000 and March 2001, and involved interviewing the same group of children and their Head of Year at secondary school.

The Focus of the Research Project in Phase 1

The first phase of the project explored how pupils felt when they knew they would not be going to a secondary school of their choice, and how this affected their motivation in Year 6 and their attitude to transfer. We explored the children's experiences of learning in the primary school, how they had negotiated the admissions procedures, their feelings about the schools they thought they would be going to as well as their knowledge and beliefs about the reputations of both good and bad schools. We asked children to project forward – did they think they would be able to be good learners in the new school, would they have to work hard, what were they looking forward to about being in secondary school?

Analysis of the Data from Primary School

When I got my second rejection I started to cry and mum got angry, saying why am I crying for? I said that I might not get into any secondary school. My mum said I shouldn't worry so.(f)

Well I don't think it's fair really because my cousin yeah she got ten choices and all ten she failed. She's like me. I feel like an orphan.(f)

It kind of makes my work go down because it's like because... I don't really care because I've only got a school that's rubbish. I don't really care.(m)

Children – and their parents – were often very upset when they received rejection letters from schools that they had chosen. At the time, they felt consigned to inferior schools, humiliated or abandoned to their fate. Far from feeling that they were able to choose a school, some children worried that no school would choose *them*. It was not easy for all children to admit to their feelings: some minimised their disappointment, saying they didn't mind or didn't care. Some children felt that not having been picked for a school they had chosen was the result of their own inadequacies, rather than it being the outcome of a highly competitive educational market. Children concluded that they weren't clever enough to get into the best schools, and found various face-saving coping strategies for explaining this away:

All the schools do the same work really so it doesn't really matter what school you go to because you just do the same thing there whatever school you go to.(f)

I know why FF rejected me – we had to take a test but they never wrote down my test scores – they just said there were two hundred or something girls there so they didn't take me – they never wrote down my test scores- I don't know why (f)

[I feel] pretty upset but I'll manage... I'll probably get a private tutor off the Internet or something.(m)

Parents' Responses

Mmy mum didn't show me because she said she was going to show me another day to not make me that upset.(f)

My dad said whatever school accepts me – he said whatever school accepts me even if I don't get no school he's going to try his best even if it costs him not going to work he's going to try his best and get me a school.(f)

Handling the rejections was no easier for their parents. Parents tried to keep back the news, hoping to find the right moment to tell children that they had not been accepted. Several children said they cried or tried not to show they were upset. Parents tried to keep children's hopes up by appealing, reminding children they were on a waiting list, or promising to find a school however hard it was. One parent comforted her child by finding fault with the rejecting school: 'my mum said like it was good that I failed because she didn't exactly like that school because her friend's daughter went there and she got pregnant'

How Children Feel about Learning

I done a test ...that was quite long and my head was aching but ... I don't care if it hurts my head ... the more education I get the more I'll learn – so that's what I need.(m)

Given these dispiriting feelings of rejection, what was nevertheless a positive surprise was the children's optimistic commitment to learning and the importance of getting a good education. It appeared that primary teachers were doing a good job in sustaining children's positive feelings about themselves as learners. At the time when they were interviewed, these Y6 children were convincing in their enthusiasm when discussing their work in their primary school. Nearly all children expressed a firm conviction that hard work in Y6 would have a positive effect on their chances in secondary school. It was noticeable, however, that the forthcoming SATs were at the forefront of their minds when thinking about working hard.

You have to work really hard but it's all worth it really.(m)

When you go to secondary school you'll know more of what you should do. (m)

Say like your SATs test and you didn't know much...you'd just get left behind. (f)

How Children Felt about Going to the Big School

I've heard that they teach you lots of things... and that's what I like about schools – when you have hard work.(f)

Many of the children looked forward to the challenge of hard work at secondary school. They did not want to be given easy work, or too little homework, both of which they saw as characteristic of inferior schools holding low expectations of pupils. They also contrasted teachers who were able to create a safe environment with a high standard of behaviour and learning with others who did not 'care' enough to enforce discipline. Children were clearly excited – if a bit nervous – about some of the new learning experiences they would have in secondary school. Most expected to work harder, mentioning new subjects and homework as features of this hard work. They spoke with excited anticipation about subjects like science, practical subjects, music and drama which were visibly very different from primary school, as well as looking forward to increased facilities in PE and information technology.

I went into the science room and all the children were experimenting ... and I like experimenting myself.(m)

There would be good subjects – not just writing but they'd teach you HOW to write ... – and like science, science you want to learn, like human body and biology. Chemistry.(f)

There was a massive music room... and straightaway I could play steel band. (f)

Working Class Children as Decision-makers

When I told my friends I was going to XX they said it was a crap school and you're going to go mad. (f)

I wanted to get into a good school and not like a rubbish one.(f)

Well mostly at FF you know I – I just don't like the school. What I've heard about FF right it's all drugs and everything it's ... the head of year said it's true...

Given their enthusiasm and excitement about learning and the new possibilities the secondary school opens up to them, it is important to examine how children make their choices about schools. Children's enthusiasm and excitement about 'the big school', reported above, was tempered by anxiety about the 'demonised' reputations of some of the local schools, and by a wistful regret that they would not be going to schools with more idealised reputations.

There are girls there who have had babies and they have their babies at school – there's a special baby room!' 'That's never going to happen to me! (ff)

I really want to go to secondary school. It's just that I keep on hearing rumours, the ones that I want to go to, yeah, that people get stabbed and that and it just scares me... all these stories get you dazzled. (m)

For working class families, especially, the local environment was a very important source of identity and sense of security. For practical, social and cultural reasons, most parents wanted their children to be educated locally. The importance of that sense of belonging and the close network of other family members and friends (Reay and Lucey, 2000) is reflected in the way that friends and the family were the sources of information most children and parents relied on when trying to pick a school. It was they who told children and their parents 'the things the brochures never tell you' about a school. Thus, the children described their own and their parents' impressions of secondary schools based largely on the reported experiences of others in the local community: 'my mother's friend's daughter goes there', 'this boy I knew'.

My mum's friend went ZZ and she's a lawyer now – and she started off in low groups, the lowest group in the school.... and now she's like a lawyer!

These sources were also the source of the mythologies of drug taking, stabbings, bullying, smoking and indiscipline in the local schools that alarmed or sometimes intrigued children. Even when children thought the stories were exaggerated, it added to their anxiety that they could not be sure. Visits to secondary schools tended to confirm parents' and children's existing impressions, both for idealised and demonised schools.

When my mum just reached the gates, she turned round: 'We're not going to that interview.' Turned round and went away. (f)

Extended Agency

Mum gave me the form and I had to understand it myself. She agreed the same schools as me. (m)

I didn't listen to anyone. I was in my bedroom and I was just thinking of the schools and my mum called me down and said write down the schools you want to go to and I wrote them down and then my mum said

they're good choices and then we went for the interview.(f)

Furthermore, for these predominantly working class pupils, it appeared that their parents allowed them an extended agency in choosing their schools. Children reported that they had a great deal of say in which schools were chosen. However, it was rare that children did not also report comments from their parents, brothers, sisters as well as other relatives and friends. Thus, although children did report that they picked the schools themselves, their choices were preceded by conversations at home and in the playground and the street.

Difficulties families face in trying to play by the rules

My mum said that if my mum was richer she would have sent me to private school or get a tutor (f)

I only chose TT because my brother when he chose two, he chose one that one that was near and one that was far, and they made him choose ZZ, and that was far – so my mum she just said just put TT down.

There are also considerable difficulties for working class parents in 'playing the game' in the admissions procedure, since following what *appear* to be transparent, open and obvious choice procedures do not result in desired outcomes. Some parents hoped that by restricting their choices from five to two or even one, they would increase their chances of getting one of the schools they wanted. Although Nixon et al. (1996) argued that neither working class children nor their parents, despite a real commitment to education, fully understood the formula needed to fulfil their desired goals, the 'strategies' available to parents are not equally accessible. For example, some parents go to serious lengths in order to meet the admissions criteria for popular or high-achieving schools. They use strategies that are relatively unavailable to working class families who, in any case, prefer their children to go to schools locally. For example, the practice of 'admission by mortgage' where parents buy or rent property within the catchment area of popular school.

What caused particular bitterness for some pupils, and their primary teachers, therefore, was when 'their' local school was also a popular, oversubscribed school.

I was very disappointed I didn't get in. It's the best school... Excellent equipment. Very strict. And quite a few of us live near but kids – from [other boroughs] are getting into it and we're not. Why can't we go to our local schools? If they haven't got a school, why don't they build one?(m)

Conclusion

Children's voices have contributed, through responses that were frank, honest and thoughtful, to the felt experience behind the statistics and the mythology about parental 'choice' of secondary school. By taking their contributions seriously, we learn from what they alone can tell us: for example, that the apparent drop in motivation feared by their primary teachers had not occurred at this stage in their learning careers; that it was bitterly disappointing for the children to be rejected by their preferred secondary schools; but, despite that, children continued to value

education and to express a commitment to learning and themselves as learners, whatever school they finally attended. Since evidence shows that respectful attention to what pupils say is correlated with improved learning performance, it is vital to take pupil consultation seriously and to use it as the basis of a practical agenda for school improvement. Not only does pupil voice help to revitalise a dialogue between teachers, pupils and learning, it also offers teachers and others a creative and practical alternative to the adult-centred bureaucracy that 'cramps' much of modern schooling. Until recently, however, these 'expert witnesses' (Rudduck, 1999) have been overlooked as perceptive and constructive contributors to a discussion which, after all, is primarily about themselves. Understandably, then, children themselves can be sceptical about our interest:

You know you've asked us if there is anything we'd like to change? If there's anything that they can do, will it happen?(f)

With that challenge, the project continues to track these young learners into their secondary schools.

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Students as Agents of Democratic Renewal in Chile

MARCIA PRIETO

We have much to learn from groundbreaking work in citizenship education (or, as some of us used to call it, education in and for democracy) coming out of South America. Supported by the national research body Fondecyt (Proyecto 1990634) Marcia Prieto, Professor of Education at the Catholic University of Valparaíso, Chile, has taken the *Students as Researchers* model and developed highly innovative work with secondary school students and university researchers working in new kinds of partnership. Not only have the student researchers developed new curriculum materials and new approaches to pedagogy, they have also begun to give substance to a 'radical collegiality' between teachers and students that points the way to a new professionalism for the 21st century. Email contact: mprieto@ucv.cl

The Chilean Context

Chile is just coming out from a long period of dictatorship and the country is facing acute problems. Findings of the *Paradoxes of Modernisation* study (PNUD, 1998) revealed that two thirds of the population felt they were either poorly informed or uninformed about many aspects that affected their lives. In the last election more than one million, two hundred thousand young potential electors did not enrol to vote, resulting in an important segment of the population not participating in the elections of the President. These results imply that Chilean people are not sufficiently interested in getting involved in what is happening in their country and have a poorly developed democratic culture. In this sense, the consequence for government was clear – it needed to develop additional efforts to support civil society and increase participation and commitment to recover the practice of a democratic way of life.

One approach is to undertake a systematic invigoration of education for democracy in schools. It should be the best place to learn and live democracy since its core principles of freedom, solidarity, equality and diversity should also be the central principles of an authentic pedagogic relationship. In fact, the value crisis of modern society and its effects have also reached schools. Schools in Chile are generally more preoccupied with achieving institutional aims than developing democratic values. In most schools it seems that individualism, consumerism and power are more obviously prominent than tolerance, solidarity, justice, respect and truth. If this is so, then, along with many other countries in the world, Chilean schools have neglected their public responsibility to develop democratic values and practices. As Andy Green reminds us, 'there is much less confidence in the ability of education systems to perform other developmental functions such as the cultivation of social solidarity, democratic citizenship and national identity' (Green, 1997, p. 10).

Chilean educational reform is failing to develop what students need to know and understand in order to be able to fully participate in a democratic society. Education for democracy only exists at the level of what we call 'transversal' aims, which means, in this country, that no statutory requirements have been set for curricular content

and objectives or for evaluation as a real transversal policy demands (Reyzabal & Sanz, 1999). Too much depends on the knowledge or willingness of teachers to engage in this kind of work and, like teachers in the UK, they have many other tasks to fulfil and very little time.

In the light of this situation, the relationship between democracy and schools should be redefined. A shift of this kind will restore public trust in schools and provide a meaningful arena for student participation and the reinvigoration of democracy in the country. A renewed commitment to strong education for democracy and to a new partnership between schools and student democracy is required to move Chile in the direction of a revitalized democratic community.

The Voices Project

New Beginnings: student research as the practice of democracy

In response to the challenges to democracy we face in our country an action research project was designed that operated with the active participation of students as the primary researchers in order to raise some of the problems of contemporary democracy from their own standpoint, with their own voices. We chose this research design because it allowed us to incorporate the very practices, values and principles that inform democracy. Participatory action research can only be developed if the whole team participates and participation is one of the basic pillars of democracy. Likewise, action research requires that all those involved can voice their suggestions and respond to those of others with respect and tolerance, both constituent principles of democracy.

In this context then, students researchers were incorporated as fully fledged members of the team whose brief was to design and develop an educational programme for democracy in their own schools. The research team included eight students from two secondary schools, four university lecturers, and an international consultant, Michael Fielding, from the University of Sussex, United Kingdom, who was particularly involved in developing the training programme for the students researchers.

Our first steps involved the joint construction of an environment for practising freedom, the free expression of ideas. In practical terms this involved the development of an agreement which articulated a set of common values on

the basis of systematic reflection and dialogue amongst all those involved. There was a shared sense that what we were trying to do was substantial and significant and that each of the contributory tasks were possible if we lived out our value aspirations. The students wanted to achieve a number of things through the project. In particular, they wanted to improve the relationships between teachers and students in their school; to translate the alienating and confusing official language of democracy into the language of young people; to get to know their democratic rights and duties; to develop a shared commitment the expression of their views; to learn from each other and to offer their learning to their schools. But most of all, they wanted to construct a better society in which every one was committed to the rights, duties and responsibilities of democratic living. (Fielding & Prieto, 2000)

Doing the Research

Students researchers interviewed sixty –four peers from the two schools that were participating in the project. Once the information was analysed by the whole team we discovered weaknesses in students' understandings of democracy and how the values and principles of democracy were distorted. On the basis of this data we designed and developed a school programme in the form of ten workshops covering five main areas: the meaning of democracy, participation, human rights, free expression and tolerance. These workshops included a variety of activities like games, individual reading of documents related to the topic, group discussions, elaboration of proposals and a number of other activities, all of them implemented in a very flexible and participatory way. One of the key elements that we tried hard to incorporate was the constant link to the everyday lives of the students in schools, 'including the things that matter to young people, the things that can help them to understand their reality and give them a stake in the future that rightly belongs to them' (Kennedy 1997 p3).

Building Community

Students working as equals with university staff, with the same rights to propose and to decide was an essential feature of the team. However, while individual expression was essential, it was also important for students to discover that democracy is not about solitary processes. On the contrary, it is about persons in dialogue, articulating the values they share, understanding their differences and reaching towards conclusions, processes and commitments which are the essence of the type of democracy that we were trying to nurture. This had implications, not only for the communal nature of our work, but also for challenging the traditional privileged status of adults over young people.

The type of work we developed resulted in an invigoration of the research team. Through the emerging realities of joint enquiry, university lecturers discovered the potential of what students had to offer and made special efforts to generate a rich, dialogic environment. This inspired in students a deep sense of moral responsibility: as one of them said, 'we are completely aware that all of us are responsible for the research.'

A genuine respect for each other's opinions was promoted: we strongly believed in the right and necessity

of students speaking for themselves. We agree with Martínez's observation that we 'ignore what pupils think and say because we do not listen to them. They are continually expressing themselves and narrating their experiences in a natural way. However, we do not listen to what they say. We do not use approaches or strategic forms to help us decode the insights they are expressing and we end up ignoring its significance' (Martinez ,1998, p. 56). When the student researchers perceived that they had achieved their right to talk, that their voices were taken into account and their contributions valued, they became motivated to make critical reflections and did not consider themselves simple objects of experiments but reflexive, autonomous and solidary people.

We were aware that the processes that lead to integration had to be strengthened to arrive at common agreements. Thus, deliberate efforts to maintaining a fluid and steady communication within the research team were made. We worked hard at the development and practice of listening, inclusion, mediation, dialogue, reflection, and closure, each of which were recognised as a fundamental tool for the emergence of a strong and effective community. This helped us to understand that creative tensions were embedded in the project's most contentious issues. But tensions are the heart of democratic struggle and the source for the generation of a resonant and vigorous community. Thus, they had to be worked out in direct processes that engaged students and teachers in an open and creative dialogue.

This allowed us to recognise the difficulties presented during the implementation of the program and carry out the necessary modifications and consolidate a collaborative form of work contributing to a common good in an atmosphere of trust, respect and mutual tolerance. We developed a significant capacity to jointly construct common ground and incorporate the diverse and sometimes opposite solutions that sprang from our discussion.

In a way, it could be said that we achieved the construction of a community that resulted in the joint growth of the whole research team. As a result of the environment we had constructed students started taking the initiative promoting and developing activities rooted in their needs. They recognised that they had acted as autonomous persons, with the ability and responsibility to participate in decisions relating both to the project and matters that affected their school life. In sum, each team member recognised the part he or she had played in the construction of the community's democratic condition. The awareness that the community we had constructed was the sum of each of our actions definitively moved the research team beyond fractionary interests towards the common good and personal growth.

Outcomes for Participants

When we started our project the expectations of the student researchers had to do with 'offering the school community motivating and engaging action and proposals so that everybody could then learn how to live democracy, grow as persons, and be committed to the society they are living in.' Thus, we not only expected to increase students' knowledge about democracy, but also to enable them to learn and practice democratic living through collective

reflection and collaborative work. In our view, this way of working would favour their personal growth and the development of both their self and social awareness.

We asked the participants to evaluate the programme so we could know from their own voices if these aims had been achieved. They said that the programme had 'helped us to know ourselves better;' that they had 'learnt to express our opinions freely. We are now able to outline arguments and defend them properly, without barriers or problems as we have learned how to share our own ideas, to respect the other's opinion and value those that thought differently.' All of this because they had 'learned how to argue, develop and defend our own ideas'; because the experience had helped them 'to grow as persons.'

We also noticed that many of the students had begun to develop the ability to self-monitor behaviour in ways which took into consideration the actions and feelings of the others. One of the student researchers acknowledged, 'Sometimes I hadn't showed due respect to the others' ideas.' Another stated that 'even though my participation was good I had expected more from myself.' The program seemed to have helped them to develop both their self awareness and their self-governance, key aspects that constitute the base of living in a democracy.

Conclusions

The long process of working with students in this project suggests that it is possible to build new knowledge and solve problems working jointly in a community of equals. As John Dayton says 'Education in democratic principles can lead to the exhilaration of discovery and the promise of hope for a better community' (Dayton 1995 p.137). It also allowed us to conclude that we had developed a certain expertise in working both with students and for them. Indeed, we learned how to design, develop and implement a program of this nature, taking into account not only our own ideas but also incorporating those of students. We recognised the importance of including students in the solution of their own problems and challenges. Our evaluations also suggest that we have carried out successful work, not only for students but also for university researchers. In this sense we see the development of this project implied the emergence of a 'radical collegiality' (Fielding, 1999).

Breaking New Ground: learning as a communal process

Whilst 'partnership' is a buzz word of school improvement and host of other initiatives within the social sciences its meaning and substance are often elusive. This initiative broke new ground in a number of respects.

Firstly, it explored new kinds of partnership amongst students themselves. The students were used to working in their schools in a hierarchical and rigid atmosphere. Working in a flexible learning structure, completely different to the one they experienced daily, allowed them to realise that learning is a dialogic and interactive encounter that goes beyond a passive process controlled by adults. In fact, they discovered that there are ways of working that transcend adding individual contributions to each other. What really happened was a cross fertilisation of their individual capacities. A student commented that 'together we work better and this way we support each other.'

This mutual support resulted in a body of different knowledge that contained the individual contributions of all the members of the team, but integrated them into a more inclusive whole. The experience seemed to provide a cohesion and identity that it would have been difficult to achieve from individual practices. It provided a more substantial group sense, because they felt supported and confident that they would be able to respond to their own expectations (Fielding & Prieto, 2000). We could say that a confluence of each one of the individual efforts took place, promoting, in turn, the development of each one. All were compelled to contribute to the search for answers to the agreed problems. The discovery that it was possible to build new knowledge starting from the activity and effort of each one, but used and understood by all, made a critical contribution to later action and the discovery of their own potential. They discovered the value of co-operating in a community of equals that had agreed on a series of values and understandings.

This approach has also allowed students to live the experience of learning how to manage their emotions. The expression of arguments respecting others' ideas, learning how to listen, not feeling personally attacked when some has a different opinion: all these were important aspects of learning how to live with others in a democratic society. One student, referring to the group work she had experienced said 'with the kind of work we have done the usual pattern related of 'the one that knows speaks and the one that doesn't only listens' has been broken.'

Secondly, it encouraged very different kinds of partnership between students and teachers. Present times invite us to look again at current notions of professionalism and seriously consider a 'radical collegiality' in which education is seen as a genuine, demanding partnership between teachers and their students, in which each learn with and from the other. Teachers were learners as well as teachers; learners were teachers as well as learners. Each needed the other in much more searching and exhilarating ways than we currently acknowledge or fully understand. Incorporating and encouraging participation and constant expression of students' voices produced a richer awareness of the abilities of students and teachers and laid the ground for a new, more inclusive professionalism.

The experiences lived by working as real partners with students reminded us of the necessity of treating them and respecting them not only as equals, but also as people that have something different and important to offer. We can no longer think of students as empty vases, or blank minds. On the contrary they have their minds already active with all that they have lived and are living. In this project students developed ways of seeing things and learned how to solve their daily problems as they were given the opportunity to reflect and had their practical knowledge valued. They were able to defend their initiatives and propose emancipatory action. In sum, we learnt how to work with students, sharing meanings, facing doubts and errors and recognising the importance of each other's contributions and their ability in solving their own problems. Yvonna Lincoln is right when she says that 'children and adults combine the power and create new forms of wisdom when they explore learning together' (Lincoln 1995 p.89).

New partnerships between universities, students, teachers and schools were at the heart of the project. Students were not the fodder for university research; rather they became key agents in the process of educational transformation. In this project student's involvement was one of the key aspects.

This involvement had a series of characteristics that proved to be successful. One of them had to do with the quality of students' participation. They were involved in all the stages of the project freely expressing their ideas, sharing power in taking decisions, interviewing their peers and analysing data, designing a school programme, acting as monitors in the realisation of the programme in their own schools, evaluating the experience, participating in the redesigning of the programme and presenting findings in conferences. All of these activities turned them into agents of change in their schools, thus, going far beyond the normal and ordinary activities they were used to being asked to do in schools.

Our experience working with student researchers met all the requirements set by Gitlin (Gitlin, 1995) for a real investigation with students. Students have been involved voluntarily in this project. They feel they have had the power to decide as they have been offered the possibility and the challenge of solving their own problems. Both their peers and the school community saw their activity as important and felt that they had created something new and worth doing.

In fact, one of the participating schools not only incorporated some of the topics we had developed with the students in their classes, but also in the form of designed and presented a school project to an international contest. In this sense it could be said that students became important persons in the school. They were institutionally recognised as such in the closing session of the academic year in front of the whole school community. The school learned that it is possible to give students responsibilities, that they will fulfil them properly and will respond to the opportunity, provided that their practical knowledge is taken into account and reflection and revision of the whole process is systematically promoted including them as valid speakers.

Finally we have produced evidence that when students perceive they not only exerted their right to voice their own ideas, and are also given the chance to identify and solve their own problems, they no longer consider themselves as simply experiments or implementers: they become agents of their own change (Breitborde, 1996; Fielding & Prieto 2000; Mena et al, 1999; Ladson-Billing, 1995; Soo Hoo, 1993). Together we created a community in which all voices were respected and valued, not only in inclusive terms, but also in critical terms. Students realised that they have capacities to participate actively and effectively in the solutions to their own problems. In sum, they became aware that they have the primary responsibility for their own development processes, for their emerging agency, and for a better future together. The motto of the Project proposed by the students themselves confirms this: 'with democracy and our voices we will be able to construct a better world.'

As partnerships and processes among schools, teachers and students develop we anticipate and advocate the growth of new governance relationships and shared responsibilities. We call upon schools to encourage partnerships among all those initiating the process of capacity building for positive change. We urge them to adopt proactive and collaborative strategies in which students and staff work together in new ways with new hope. Widening student disaffection with society requires it: the future of vibrant democracy in and through education depends upon it.

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Opening the Floodgates: giving students a voice in school reform

DANA MITRA

In the first of our two contributions from North America, Dana Mitra, a doctoral student at the Center for Research on the Context of Teaching, Stanford University, USA helps us to understand some of the complexities and challenges, as well as the excitement and satisfaction, of students conducting research into things that matter to them about their daily experience of schooling. Echoing some of the issues coming out of Marcia Preito's work, one of the most heartening and compelling is the emergence of a new awareness of the reciprocal nature of learning, of how students and teachers can learn with and from each other. Email contact: dmitra@leland.stanford.edu

How can high schools improve outcomes for students? While many schools have struggled with how to improve student outcomes, two high schools in the United States have decided to go straight to the source. They ask the students.

On a summer day in northern California, the fog rolls across the sky above the sprawling campus of Seacrest High. Most teenagers are at their summer jobs in this bedroom community containing a mix of working- and middle-class students from primarily Caucasian, Filipino, and Latino backgrounds. But today four students are back at school. They sit in a circle called 'fishbowl.' Teachers sit in a bigger circle outside the student fishbowl watching intently and taking notes.

- The adult facilitator, a teacher in the school, asks the students. 'What works and what doesn't work that teachers do to help students learn?'
- The room remains quiet for a good minute until a student responds, 'In a lot of my classes, the smart people raise their hands, and they always listen to them more than the people who barely raise their hands.'
- Adds another student, 'Often there might be favoritism in some cases. Like you could have one student who comes in late but does his work but he won't get in trouble. Another comes in who doesn't do all this work but enough to pass and he'll get in more trouble.'
- A third student admits, 'Some teachers gave up on me instead of encouraging me. I think they gave up on me because I gave up.'
- The facilitator waits for all responses and then asks another question: 'How do you learn best?' Students respond more quickly to this question. 'I need to see it, act it out, you know?'
- Another student chimes in, 'I learn a lot better from people who sit next to me than the teacher. The teacher puts me near all the people who earn good grades and the people who are passing. I learn from them.' Two other students nod in agreement.

A member of a privately-funded reform effort called the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC), Seacrest received a large amount of funding—\$250 per student for five years—to identify and work to improve an issue of concern at their school. Unlike many reform

efforts that prescribe a change, BASRC encourages schools to examine their own contexts to determine what changes are best for their communities. As was the case for many secondary schools in the area, Seacrest examined the question of why a large percentage of students in their first two years of secondary school (ages 14 and 15) were failing classes.

Considering what data would be most informative for deciding how to improve their school, Seacrest teachers and administrators decided that asking failing students why they believed they were unsuccessful was a critical step to understand how to reach these youth. They invited students who in the previous year had received at least three D's or F's to participate in a focus group during a summer staff-training. The students in the fishbowl were asked to speak truthfully to help their teachers understand how they might make the school a better place to learn. When asked to explain why some students do not succeed in school, the students in their own words talked about differences in learning styles, needing additional counseling and tutoring, and having a sense of mutual respect between teachers and students. Their responses provided teachers with specific reform issues to target in the upcoming year.

Seacrest found that increasing student voice made sense for a number of reasons. First, student voices gave a clearer picture of the reasons that students struggle in school and calls into question the assumption that failing students don't care about their future. When given the chance, these students at risk of dropping out of school spoke articulately and compassionately about what prevents them from succeeding at school. A teacher present at the focus groups described the student responses as 'very honest, very serious, their chance to contribute. They were careful to say what they really felt. They were not trying to mislead us. They weren't saying what we thought we wanted them to say. I was in awe.'

Seacrest also discovered a sense of powerlessness felt by both teachers and students to improve student outcomes. The reform leadership at Seacrest also surveyed the teachers to see why they believed students were failing in large numbers. The list was remarkably different from that given by the students. The top two answers from

teachers were motivation (30 % of responses) and attendance (16.5%). In focus groups, students of all backgrounds and academic tracks pointed to specific problems with the school as the basis of the failure of many classmates, rather than locating their difficulties in themselves or their neighborhoods as did many of their teachers. By not involving students, particularly those who are failing subjects or rarely attending school, it is easy to shift the blame of failure to these students rather than looking at problems with the school's structure and culture.[1] As a result of this difference in perspectives, often students and teachers blame each other rather than working together to improve teaching and learning.

While teachers can speculate about why students are failing or how students learn best, schools in the United States rarely work with students to understanding the problems within their schools. Often student leadership is limited to planning school dances or raising funds for school activities. The experience of Seacrest high school demonstrates the potential benefits of involving youth—those who experience the school daily—in the process of improving in the school.

Students with Teachers to Read the Currents

When Whitman High School joined the BASRC reform effort, they also decided to ask students from a range of ethnicities, social groupings, and academic performance what needed to be improved in the school for them to be successful. Located in a working-class community, half of Whitman's students are English Language Learners and half qualify for public students. The school graduates just over half (57%) of the students that start at Whitman as ninth graders (14 year olds)..

What was different about Whitman's process compared to Seacrest is that in addition to sharing their opinions of the school, these youth also conducted the analysis of the data. Rather than the teachers interpreting the students' comments, the students themselves reviewed the transcripts. They found that Whitman students continuously raised five concerns that they most felt needed to be improved in the school.

Improved school reputation. The students did not want to feel ashamed of their school.

Classes based on similar ideas/material. The students wanted coherence in their education. For example, they expected that their 10th grade math class would build upon the concepts learned in ninth grade.

Better communication between staff and students. Great animosity existed between teachers and students at Whitman, reported the students. They strongly felt that this tension needed to be changed into positive relationships.

Better/higher quality of teaching; higher standards. Teachers needed to teach better and they also needed to expect more of their students

Better counseling and support. Students felt that they did not receive sufficient support when making decisions about what to do after they graduated from Whitman, whether it be college, employment, or the Armed Forces. They also did not feel they received much support when they first came to Whitman as ninth graders, including what courses to take in high school and how to succeed in their classes.

The students presented these findings to their teachers during an after-school meeting.

The reform leadership at Whitman was struck by the difference it made having students interpret the focus group data rather than adults alone. They noticed that when adults analyzed the data, they translated 'student speak' into adult words that did not always have the same meaning. Having Whitman students at the table preserved the integrity in the student voices by ensuring that the adults understood the issues students felt were most important. One example is the lack of alignment between adult and student interpretation of students skipping classes. The adults could not understand why Latina students in particular kept missing class even though they expressed in the focus groups that they wanted to do better in school. The students explained that the Latina students were saying that they felt embarrassed and ashamed when they returned from absences. The teachers seemed hostile and angry with them for missing class. It was easier for these students to not discuss with the teacher the reasons for their absence and to learn about the work that they missed than to engage in a potentially hostile interaction. Having this information helped to inform future teacher interactions with Latina students.

In addition to focusing the work of reform at the school, the student focus groups provided youth with an opportunity to learn adult roles by learning how to conduct research on an important issue in their school and present results to their teachers. Youth need such opportunities to empower them and promote socially acceptable behavior and skills.[2] It also empowered students by increasing their ownership of the changes happening in the school.[3]

A junior at Whitman explains how participation in the focus groups and analysis changed his relationship to the school: 'I didn't want to get involved with school because why should I be here anymore than I have to? I don't like being here even when I'm in class. But then I was in here [working on the focus group research] and I was like Whoa! I talk and people actually listen. That's a good thing. Because if you talk and people don't listen, you don't want to talk anymore.' Participating in the group improved his opinion of himself and provided opportunities for extended interactions that helped to develop meaningful interactions with adults at the school.

Channeling the Stream

Partnering with students resulted in struggles along with victories. When Whitman students presented their focus group analysis to the teachers, many teachers appreciated the feedback and thanked the students for providing it to them. However, the presentation offended a handful of teachers to the dismay of the student presenters. According to one of the students at the meeting, 'A few [teachers] were really avid that no, it's not the teachers, it's the students fault. And that's not what we're going for. That's not what we're after... We don't want to point any fingers. We're together with teachers to fix the problems why students aren't learning the way we're supposed to.' Students were surprised and hurt by the reaction of these hostile teachers. Another student added,

I think that everybody needs someone else to tell them their mistakes because you don't always see your own mistakes. And I guess you don't want to hear their mistakes... If a teacher would come up and talk to students about something, it would be different. But when the students get together and we talk amongst

ourselves and we come out with [our own ideas] and try to present it to them, they have a real big problem with accepting that. Like, 'I'm the teacher, you're the student, what are you trying to do?' ... Why not listen to your most important resource that you got, rather than just do your own thing?

Prior to this meeting, students and teachers had not had many opportunities to talk honestly and openly about the problems in the school. Involving students in the core decisions of improving teaching and learning required openly addressing the taken-for-granted roles of teachers and students in the school. Student voice had been blocked before, and unblocking the dam caused a pouring forth of emotions, anger, and passion.

That summer, the school held its first staff development session on the new curriculum reform beginning at the school. Learning from the experiences sharing focus group data, students and the adult reform leaders struggled with how to create norms for communication so that students could speak honestly but still have their views accepted by teachers. To make the relationship between students and teachers productive for this meeting, the reform leader at the school took several steps to scaffold the process of student participation in the previously teacher-only domain of school change.

Prior to the staff development session, the coordinator of reform at the school held a meeting to explain in detail the goals of the session to the students. The meeting helped the students understand the language of 'teacher-ese' so that the students could better understand and contribute to the conversations. The reform coordinator explained the concepts of standards, assessment, and curriculum. He also taught them about multiple intelligences and worked with students for them to think about how to articulate the ways in which they learned best. Students engaged in exercises in which they discovered whether they learn better hearing a lesson, seeing it, or engaging in an activity. They used this knowledge the following day during the training to explain to teachers what types of instruction would allow them to learn better.

When the staff development session began the next day, the reform leader ensured that the students were seated about the room so that at least one student was at each table of teachers. He then opened the meeting by introducing the students as 'partners in the conversation.' This point was re-emphasized a few times. He also stressed the importance of students and teachers keeping names out of the conversation. In mixed company, the naming of individual people can create huge problems. Throughout the day, the reform leader checked in with students to see if they were comfortable with the activities and understood the work. Teachers also took it upon themselves to check student understanding of what was happening. Nonetheless, the more discussions became frustrated or passionate, the less teachers remembered to actively include students. At these times, the reform leader would encourage student participation by asking for student comments when they did not volunteer them.

Student participation in the staff development session proved useful for many reasons. The students became informed of the changes teachers were trying to make. They also were able to interact with their teachers in a

different role than in the classroom. One student explained, 'When I first came, that made me want to come even more because you get to interact with the teachers and see how they really are—not only as they act in the classroom.' This allowed them to see teachers as fallible and sincere in making changes and it allowed them to build some positive relations with them.

The teachers also benefited from student participation, reminding teachers of why they were embarking on the tough business of the reform. Having students presented also helped to keep teachers focused on the staff development session. One teacher reflecting explained that having students at each table during the training 'helped people to kind of stay on-task and kind of just focused them on the reason we're here. And a lot of staff remarked just how you get a really sometimes surprising, sometimes a very insightful perspective with a student at the table, and you don't have to second-guess what they would think. Because so many teachers seem to think . . . They often think they're the experts of how students would react and what they would think. And I think people find it refreshing.'

Rising the Tide to Float All Boats

Students and teachers at Whitman often talk about student voice in their school reform process has created opportunities for meaningful change in the school. Some students report studying harder because after participating in the school reform work they have a greater understanding of the system and what it takes to get to college. According to one student, 'I take more responsibility since the [group began] because it was something we had to take responsibility for. Since then, all of us have responsibilities now into everything.... Before I wouldn't care. Now I have more responsibility with my homework.'

Other students have mentioned that they have become more a part of the school community since being involved with reform. Students participating in the reform work come to school more and also participate in other activities in the school. As one boy explained, 'Before I got involved, I wasn't doing any extracurricular activities whatsoever. I didn't play any sports, I didn't hang out at the school for anything. I would go to school and then I would go home. Now that I'm [working with] BASRC, I've done a whole bunch of different things.' This student recently joined the baseball team and managed the school play in addition to his growing work with reform at his school.

Student involvement also offers opportunities for changing the ways that students and adults interact. Both teachers and students speak overwhelmingly of an increased communication and understanding of each other. Teachers talk about understanding students better and, therefore, becoming better teachers.

I think it makes me a much better teacher. I think getting to know kids outside of the classroom is huge and is so unique, and it heightens my awareness and appreciation of the kids too. It's always wonderful to see them be caring too. Because sometimes... the sense of apathy can be overwhelming just because of the things that they're up against in terms of the neighborhood they live in and the school that they go

to. So just kind of seeing their keen awareness, as well as their excitement and willingness and desire to make things better. It's a good shot in the arm.

Even the most dedicated teachers need to be reminded of the talents of their students to keep up their energy to continue the hard work of change.

Ensuring the Flow of Voice Continues

At Seacrest and Whitman, opportunities for student voice and student partnership have continued as the schools find more reasons to build connections between teachers and students. Seacrest held eight additional student focus groups during the school year to provide additional data for revising intervention efforts for failing students. They are working this year on developing a house for ninth and tenth graders that will provide more support and extra learning opportunities to help reduce student failure in these grades. Whitman students have continued to meet to find ways to create ways to address the concerns they found in their focus-group research. For example, the students in the group have developed tours of their neighborhoods so that they can have a way to help teachers understand better the students they teach and how they live.

If reforms are ultimately changing student outcomes, it is important to value the knowledge and experiences of students by including them in the process of change and to

create stronger partnership between adults and youth. In the words of one Whitman student speaking about their participation in the school's reform work, 'We have opened their eyes so that they can see us and look at us in a different way than just students. They look at us as people.'

Notes

- [1] Most of the US dropout literature is deficit-based, not looking at organizational and structural issues of the school as reasons for failure. See, for example: Michelle Fine (1991) *Framing Dropouts: notes on the politics of an urban high school*, in Henry A. Giroux & Peter L. McLaren (Eds) *Teacher Empowerment and School Reform*. Albany: State University of New York Press.; Robin D.G. Kelley (1997) *Yo' mama's disfunkcional! Fighting the culture wars in urban America*. Boston: Beacon Press; Robert B. Stevenson & Jeanne Ellsworth (1993) *Dropouts and the Silencing of Critical Voices*, in Lois Weis & Michelle Fine (Eds) *Beyond Silenced Voices: class, race, and gender in United States schools*. Albany: State University of New York Press; and Gary G. Wehlage et al. (1989) *Reducing the Risk: schools as communities of support*. London: Falmer Press.
- [2] Karen J. Pittman & Marlene Wright (1991) *Bridging the Gap: a rationale for enhancing the role of community organizations in promoting youth development*. Washington: Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development.
- [3] A similar effect is discussed in Seymour B. Sarason (1996) *Revisiting 'The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change'*, 2nd edn. New York: Teacher's College Press.

Squeaky Wheels and Flat Tires: a case study of students as reform participants

ELENA SILVA

A particularly striking point to emerge from our second contribution from North America is the absolute necessity of facing up to the fact that some students take more readily to student voice work than others. Recurring strands in earlier articles by Leora Cruddas and Sara Bragg, issues of class, race and gender now come centre stage. This does not lead Elena Silva, a doctoral student at the Graduate School of Education at the University of California-Berkeley, USA, to suggest we abandon our work in the light of such findings: rather she urges us to acknowledge those things which help and those things which hinder student participation and intensify our efforts to develop a more inclusive practice. Email contact: esilva@uclink.berkeley.edu

In the past several years, there has been increasing attention to the subject of student inclusion in school decision-making and reform (SooHoo, 1993; Wasley et al, 1997; Rudduck & Flutter, 1999; Levin, 1994, 1999; Fielding, 2001). While the notion of making schools more democratic and student-inclusive spaces is certainly not new [1] the term 'student voice' has recently emerged as a popular buzzword in American school reform. This renewed focus has revived numerous philosophical and practical arguments over why and to what extent schools should include students, as well as equally significant debates over how schools might best structure and cultivate student participation in school reform efforts.

While certainly valuable and significant to the efforts of individual schools and larger reform initiatives, these debates mostly center on the organizational character of schooling (i.e. how schools might restructure committees or advisory groups to invite student participation). [2] Yet, almost no attention is paid to the students themselves, and to the pressures, concerns and conflicts that dominate their school experiences and ultimately determine whether or not they will accept a school's invitation to participate in reform efforts. If schools intend to embrace student voice as a tenet of the decision-making and reform process, it is critical not only to examine the role of the school, but also to explore how students negotiate and define their positions as participants or non-participants in school change efforts. Particularly with respect to disturbing race- and class-based inequities in American public schools and a growing movement of related equity-based reforms, it is vital to consider how and why some students choose to participate while others opt out of the school change process.

This article looks closely at a group of students in Berkeley, California who became involved in change efforts at their high school. It draws on over three years of ethnographic research during which time I served as an advisor to and advocate for these students.[3] During this time, the students spent a considerable amount of their time struggling with the organization and politics of their school and battling for greater inclusion. However, some

of the most profound struggles they faced occurred within their own group, outside of their formal interactions with the school and its adult reformers. This article examines these more informal dilemmas of meaning and identity that framed much of these students' experiences with and attitudes toward school reform. It recounts some of the students' struggles to define the meaning and purpose of their efforts and to negotiate their place and position within these efforts. Moreover, this article highlights the powerful influence of racial, class and gender identity on student participation, particularly in the context of a school struggling to overcome a culture of inequity and division.

The Meaning and Purpose of Reform

Berkeley High School (BHS), like many other large public high schools in California, is both proud of and plagued by its diverse student body. On the one hand, the school is applauded for its racial, ethnic and socioeconomic representation of Berkeley's surrounding city and community. On the other hand, BHS is troubled by its persistent inability to provide an equitable education to all of its students. These inequities fall undeniably along lines of race, ethnicity, and class [4] and are manifest in student achievement, course placement, disciplinary referrals, and the completion of college admission requirements. Racial and ethnic divisions are also evident among student social and extracurricular activities. One student, an African American male [5] describes the two types of students he sees at BHS:

We got squeaky wheels and flat tires... Some smooth white walls rollin' their way right to college, gettin' oil all the way. And then the rest of us...flat tires! Bumpin' on down the road, making all sorts of crude noises. Probably fall off real soon anyway. Ain't worth the grease.

Berkeley High's past attempts to alter these patterns of inequity and division have fallen far short of success. In its 1996 report, the state accreditation board criticized the school for its weak reform outcomes, pointing to its lack of 'shared participation and collaboration' within the reform

process. Indeed, it seemed clear that teachers, parents, and certainly students at BHS were not committed to or even aware of recent reform efforts.[6] It was in this context, four years ago, that my work began with the 'student outreach' group, a diverse body of students recruited to work together to understand and challenge the race- and class-based inequities at the school.[7]

One of the most striking themes that emerged from my work with these students was their attention to the meaning and purpose of the student outreach group and its efforts. They were concerned from the start with the group's position within the school and how this position might represent or misrepresent their identity and intentions. In particular, the extent to which the group's efforts were directly linked to the school was a determining factor of their participation.

A formal connection to the school seemed to encourage the participation of students who were already high achievers and engaged in other school-centered activities. At various points in the group's development, these students offered comments such as

'Are we a formal club? I mean, when I'm filling out a form about my extracurricular activities, can I list it as a student organization?'; 'The principal said we could go to that [planning meeting] as student representatives. So, basically, we're like legitimate members of the planning committee and I think we should call ourselves that.'; 'We're like the leadership class [student government], except beyond picking graduation themes and colors and stuff.'

To these students, predominantly White/Caucasian females, it seemed important for the group to exist as an official, or 'legitimate', component of the school's activities and efforts. As they themselves had experienced success through cooperation with the school's rules and policies, it seemed appropriate to them for the group to behave in a similar, more conformist, manner. 'They are just going to ignore us if we get all rowdy,' stated one of the students.

For other students, any formal connection to the school was unsettling at best. Notably, these students offered some of the most crucial viewpoints for reform, as they exemplified students who were not being well-served by the school. Predominantly students of color from neighboring, poorer communities, and those with the lowest levels of achievement, they described many of their experiences with the school as 'harsh' and contentious. For these students, their participation seemed to be incited by their desire to disturb the traditional decision-making and reform process of the school, not to be a part of it. Thus, they were the swiftest to leave if and when the group began to lean toward school-supported activities. 'This is not a school club and it ain't at all like leadership. Let's be clear – we are an activist group,' said one student whose comment was immediately followed by both nodding heads and uneasy glances.

One discussion toward the end of their first year illustrates the intensity with which these students defined their efforts and themselves in relation to their efforts. The group had planned a school-wide performance depicting student experiences with racial inequality at BHS and, at the last minute, the administration had decided that the performance should instead be a multicultural assembly

co-hosted by the school's leadership class. The students' engaged in a two-hour debate over this decision during one of their meetings:

(Amber) 'Okay, but we still have a spotlight. We can wear our shirts [a fist and microphone design developed by one of the students earlier in the semester] and maybe recruit more students. Our goal is really about multiculturalism anyway.'

(Ron) 'No it is NOT. And this has nothing to do with change.'

(Christina) 'They want us to be the mc's at their thing- just to make us part of their plan. I say we protest the assembly.'

(Lisa) 'We wanted the assembly. It was our idea to perform in the first place.'

(Walid) 'THIS was not our idea! Our idea was tight- it was revolutionary. Now we're supposed to invite everybody for some wack 'everybody be like everybody' assembly. That ain't my message.'

(Jerome) 'Walid is right. We need to be liberated from this bullshit. Everyday we have to come to this school and hear all about Euro-centric this and that. This assembly promotes that and I ain't about that.'

(Amber) 'Fine. Then you don't have to. But I think it would look bad to the teachers and the other students if we don't show up. Besides, I think I'd make a good mc...'

(Walid) 'Well, you go ahead then if that's what it's about for you. You're buying into it though, being their mc. What's up with this group, though, seriously. What are we doing? I mean, I thought we were trying to upset the setup.'

The use of the term 'we' throughout this exchange demonstrates their sense of shared group identity. However, also evident in this exchange is the struggle among the students to define the objective and purpose of the group. Clearly, there is disagreement over the direction of the group, as Amber comments, 'Our goal is about multiculturalism,' followed by Ron who states unequivocally, 'No, it is NOT!' and Walid and Jerome who, respectively, reply 'That ain't my message' and 'I ain't about that'.

In the end, three of the students agreed to help out with the assembly while the more resistant students eventually conceded, unconvincingly, that they did not care one way or the other. Yet, some of later comments by Walid and Ron point to the likelihood that they were giving up on the group, rather than the issue. Walid commented that Amber, who self-identified as a mixed-race White/African American, 'fit right in' to the multicultural theme. 'That's good for them. Impress the teachers. But not me,' he concluded. Notably, those students who protested the group's participation were mostly male and all Black/African American and Chicano/Latino. What the group represented- or did not represent- for these students was a powerful influence on their willingness to identify with the group and the group's efforts. These students approached the group with considerable distance during the last month of the school year and at the start of the following year expressed disinterest in the 'renewed'

efforts of the group. Ron explained his own choice to pursue other things,

I just have my own priorities right now. They [student outreach] have some good ideas, but I'm not so much about empowering the school. I'm more about empowering myself and my people.

Power and Position

That following year, the student outreach group reconvened with a combination of newly recruited students and several students from the past year. Early into the semester, the group was invited by the school's new administration to take part in a schoolwide collaborative planning process. The principal welcomed the involvement of a diverse group of students who would represent and reach out to the larger student body. Collaborating with the school in this way seemed like a powerful way to insert a diversity of student voices into the reform process. Yet, in the first month of its new charge, the group diminished noticeably in size and diversity.

Students left because they no longer felt a connection to or interest in the group's purpose, or because they had pressing after-school obligations to family, jobs and schoolwork. Those who remained were predominantly female (only two of nine were male) and White/Caucasian or Black/African American (as well as one Iranian female).

The group was now smaller and each of its members had agreed to its new status as a formal part of the school's reform. Yet, despite this common sense of purpose and the group's smaller size, the negotiation of power and position within the group seemed to intensify. Now that there were fewer students, the differences among them seemed all the more obvious. Students demonstrated varying levels of social and cultural capital[8] as well as skills and resources. These disparities, although certainly representative of the larger student body, resulted in a distribution of power and voice within the group that mirrored the inequities of the larger school. Mostly affluent, predominantly White, and notably female students were urged into leadership positions in the group while others were relegated to support positions. In this way, the group manifested the very problems it set out to reform.

Students who recognized the arcane language of reform and were familiar with the adult processes of organizational decision-making were the obvious choices for leadership roles. They offered comments such as:

I can facilitate. My mother is the director of social services, so she talks about having to lead meetings like this all the time' and 'You know what we need? We need to write a formal proposal outlining all of our ideas.

These students, in their efforts to be helpful and supportive, would unwittingly strip responsibilities and the accompanying power from others. After one meeting, a student volunteered to type up the minutes only to be assured by another student,

No, that's okay. It'll be harder for you. I have a computer at home and I already have a template for minutes so I can easily do it.

At another meeting, when the group was deciding who would present their issues to the principal, I suggested that Annie, the single ESL student in the group, be one of the presenters. Almost all of the students agreed that this student did not have the language skills to present. Even Annie stated, 'I'll mess up and say the wrong thing.' When I commented that a lot of students at BHS had limited English skills and that she might be able to better represent the needs of those students, an African American student said,

That's totally true, but I think somebody like Sheila or Mark could really explain that better than Annie.

Especially since it's the principal we're talking about. We don't want to go in there and sound stupid. No offense, I mean I couldn't do it either.

In this case, the students were united in their decision to promote the leadership of the most skilled communicator. Here, it seemed most significant to the students that they sound impressive and well-practiced, and that they avoid 'messing up', 'sounding stupid' or saying the 'wrong' thing in front of the principal. The notion of representing the larger student body, including limited-English speakers, became secondary to the importance of an articulate delivery.

While the boosting of some students into prominent positions was sometimes a united effort (as above), this was not always the case. At times, there were conflicts over what skills, knowledge and experiences warranted influence and attention. At one point, several members of the group presented at a local forum on student participation. Two students, a Black female student named Nicole and a White female student named Sara, explain the entrance process to an AP class at BHS:

(Nicole) You can't get into an AP class unless you write an essay...I mean, you can if you want to do all that work. My friend wrote a really good essay and got in, but I didn't want to so I didn't...

(Sara) But, the important thing to understand is that a lot of people don't know how or don't have the information they need to write that essay or get in. Most of the students who get in are already AP and they're mostly White. I mean, like Nicole, you didn't know and that's not your fault.

(Nicole, clearly frustrated) I didn't say it was my fault. I said I didn't want to. And it's not like there are no Black students that can get in or anything, Sara.

(Sara) No, I know. But you don't understand. I'm talking about access and opportunity and how the school treats certain students- tracks them- based on different expectations. Like the data we read last week. We read this article about...

Sara continued to talk to an audience of adults who were duly impressed by her ability to articulate her ideas and opinions. Nicole had grown quiet. I asked her after the forum why she stopped talking. She replied,

I don't know...It's just like Sara always knows what to say, so I just shut up. I mean, I guess she's right, she's in all these AP classes, but she doesn't really get it and sometimes it pisses me off ... I mean, she shouldn't try to speak for me.

In this instance, the students are waging a small and subtle battle over who is more qualified to speak on this issue. While it is Nicole who can ostensibly comment on the experience of a Black student applying for a AP class, it is Sara's sympathetic and well-informed critique of Nicole's circumstance, and that of other Black students, that draws the most attention. Ironically, Sara is acknowledging the privilege of some students over others as she acts on that very privilege to overpower Nicole's message.

Nicole's comment that 'Sara always knows what to say' but that she 'shouldn't try to speak for me' summarizes one of the largest dilemmas of the student outreach group and of the larger issue of student participation in school reform. Which students are representing the 'student voice' of their school? And in the context of reform, can these students who are best-served by the current setup of their school possibly serve the interests of students who are least-served?

Jonathan, the only White male student who continued to participate with the group, shared his thoughts on this dilemma of student participation:

It's unknown territory for a lot of people. So for them to be heard, it takes that much more effort. It seems to me that the students who are here [in student outreach] don't really need to be. I mean, the students who are getting things changed are all the students who are going to college anyway. How much change do I really need? I'm already going to college. But we talk- we're expected to talk- about the problems as if we know what it's like for the rest of the students who don't really like school. It doesn't make much sense, in terms of reform at least.

Toward More Equitable Inclusion

Berkeley High School is not alone in its goals to achieve equity and diversity under one roof. Many urban secondary schools now point to these dual reform goals and increasing numbers of educators and reformers posit that student participation is critical to the success of such reforms. Without student representation and buy-in, they argue, the reforms will not be effective or sustainable. Certainly, increasing student participation and voice in reform efforts can only improve the chances of successful and lasting reform. After three years with BHS students, I am only a stronger advocate for their inclusion in decisions that impact their lives and education. They are dynamic, interesting and willful young people who are filled with intriguing ideas and great insights which deserve attention.

Yet, in the movement to include these students, we must be careful to avoid embracing the most convenient, often narrow, view of what student participation and voice looks and sounds like. As adult teachers, educators and reformers, we must recognize that the school's embossed invitation to participate looks unfamiliar, unattractive, or out of reach to many students, especially those most in need of serious changes at their school. Particularly in the context of a growing racial and class inequities, it seems critical to consider how efforts at student inclusion might merely lend additional support to already well-supported students. The story of these BHS students illustrates how efforts to increase student voice and participation can actually reinforce a hierarchy of power and privilege

among students and undermine attempted reforms. To those of us who are committed to empowering student voices and inviting student participation, the experiences of these BHS students present a challenge. In our efforts to increase student voice, we must recognize what limits and fosters student participation and we must commit to a model of student inclusion that oils more than the squeakiest wheels.

Notes

[1] The democratic (free/open) schools movement emphasized student participation as an essential part of its curriculum, although this movement primarily impacted students in suburban and private schools. More recently, the field of critical pedagogy has embraced the notions of student voice and inclusion in opposition to the 'silencing' and 'exclusionary' practices of many public schools.

[2] There are a variety of strategies used to include students in reform. These range from low levels of involvement (i.e. surveying student opinion or including a single student representative on an advisory committee) to higher levels of involvement (i.e. youth-generated and youth-led efforts).

[3] My official role at the high school was as a graduate student researcher and member of the Diversity Project, a school-university collaborative action research project designed to study and challenge the patterns of racial and class inequity at Berkeley High. As a part of this work, I coordinated the 'student outreach' committee of the Diversity Project, aimed at engaging a large and diverse community of students in the reform efforts of the school.

[4] Studies at BHS have illustrated race- and class-based patterns of inequity in which predominantly White, Asian, and affluent students achieve at higher levels and are disciplined at lower levels than less affluent, predominantly Black and Latino students.

[5] Throughout this article, students are racially identified according to how they self-identified at that time.

[6] BHS was in the process of whole school reform. That is, it was considering (and implementing in some cases) several major structural and curricular reforms (i.e. the development of small learning communities).

[7] Over a three year period, student outreach consisted of a group of students, ranging in number from 4 to 16, recruited by BHS teachers to represent a variety of grade levels, achievement levels, racial and ethnic communities, and social and academic peer groups. The group was largely guided by the students themselves, but was formally organized and directed, at various points, by me and several BHS teachers.

[8] social capital refers to the power and resources that students gain through social networks; cultural capital refers to the power and resources that students gain through having an awareness and mastery of the tastes, preferences, and behaviors of dominant culture (Bourdieu 1973).

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Beyond the Rhetoric of Student Voice: new departures or new constraints in the transformation of 21st century schooling?

MICHAEL FIELDING

In the final contribution to this special issue, Michael Fielding, Reader in Education at the University of Sussex and *FORUM* Editorial Board member, develops a framework for evaluating the conditions for student voice. He draws on each of the contributors' articles and other research to explore some of the key issues beginning to emerge in a movement that has the dual capacity to either keep us even more securely in our current way of doing things, or develop genuinely transformative practices that offer the possibility of more creative, more fulfilling alternatives. Email contact: m.fielding@sussex.ac.uk

Work on student voice in schools, communities and universities is at an interesting crossroads. There is much talk about its importance, a rapidly growing research literature (see Fielding 2001b and Rudduck & Flutter 2000 for some useful references), much well-intentioned advocacy, and a very wide range of practice that has within it quite different intentions and aspirations for the future. Within the UK context, a mark of its importance is the funding of a major ESRC (Economic & Social Research Council) Network Project – *Consulting Pupils About Teaching & Learning* (see the back pages of this special issue for further details) – that forms part of the wider ESRC Teaching & Learning Research Programme. In other countries across the world there is also an equivalent growth of new practice and emerging research knowledge. This special issue of *FORUM* has contributions from South America (Chile) and North America (USA) and there are strong traditions elsewhere, e.g. in Australia (e.g. Comber & Thomson, 1999; Holdsworth, 2000a&b) and Canada (e.g. Levin, 1998, 2000a&b), that have been exploring and developing important new territory for some time.

What are we to make of it all? Are we witnessing the emergence of something genuinely new, exciting and emancipatory that builds on rich traditions of democratic renewal and transformation? Are we, as Jean Rudduck and Julia Flutter (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000) have recently asked via the beautifully crafted phrase of Maxine Greene, 'carving a new order of experience'? Or are we presiding over the further entrenchment of existing assumptions and intentions using student or pupil voice as an additional mechanism of control? What are some of the key questions we might ask to help us develop a more revealing and differentiated understanding of the apparent vogue for encouraging the voice of young people in school and community settings?

In attempting to answer these questions I draw both on the more usually encountered past and current examples of student voice work with which we are all familiar and on the ground-breaking developments explored by contributors to this special issue of *FORUM*. I take as my organisational structure nine clusters of questions that seek to probe the rhetorics and realities of student voice. Firstly, there is a set of questions about who is allowed to speak; secondly, who listens; thirdly, what skills are required and what support provided for their development; fourth, what attitudes and dispositions are needed to transform skills into meaningful realities; fifth, what systems are needed to sustain this kind of work; sixth, what kinds of organisational culture need to develop to enable student voice to thrive; seventh, what spaces, both physical and metaphorical, are needed for participants to make meaning together; eighth, what are the implications for action; and, finally, what are some of the key considerations to take into account in helping student voice to be and become a significant part of the process of communal renewal?

Speaking

- *Who* is allowed to speak?
- *To whom* are they allowed to speak?
- *What* are they allowed to speak about?
- What *language* is encouraged / allowed?

Many of the bright hopes of the student voice movement talk with enthusiasm and passion about students being able to speak about what matters to them, about the insights and understandings that many teachers and other adults had not thought young people capable of to any significant degree. And yet, when we stand back and ask questions not only about who is allowed to speak, but to whom their words can legitimately be addressed, what those students are allowed to speak about, what language is encouraged or admissible, then our advocacy has to face up to hard

realities that remain unevenly open to either the possibility or the practicalities of change.

Who is Allowed to Speak?

Questions about who is allowed to speak remind us that encounters are always framed by the realities of power and that these matters are invariably significant, especially to those who seem to have less of it. Research presented in this issue of *FORUM* (see e.g. papers by Leora Cruddas and Elena Silva) and elsewhere (e.g. Arnot et al, 2001; McIntyre & Pedder, 2001) also reminds us that students are not all the same. To talk about student voice is misleading. Some voices (e.g. middle class girls) seem to be more willing to speak than others, partly because they may feel more at ease with the way teachers speak about students and with the capacity of schools to understand what matters to them in their daily lives. This more differentiated awareness of student voice thus raises issues of validity and the degree to which some students can legitimately speak on behalf of others. To what extent do the perceptions and intentions of students who are most often and most readily listened to reflect the experience of those students for whom school is an uncongenial or alienating place? As Elena Silva puts it, 'which students are representing the 'student voice' of their school? And in the context of reform, can these students who are best-served by the current set-up of their school possibly serve the interests of students who are least-served?'

Whilst it is true that issues of student voice(s) are more complex and more contested than the advocacy and the rhetoric often allows, it is also true that there is a growing recognition, firstly, that this is an issue that needs to be addressed and, secondly, that there is some evidence that headway is beginning to be made. Leora Cruddas gives exciting and insightful examples of marginalised students such as EBD girls becoming very involved in ways which begin to challenge stereotypes and construct new realities. The fact that this is happening outside mainstream and with the intervention of an external person to school does not detract from the obvious potential of such work. As one of the students remarked, 'I think it's sad that we have had to have this group just to voice our opinions. Don't teachers realise we've got opinions?' There are other examples of similar work taking place in Essex where the LEA have developed an exciting exploratory tradition with regard to student voice in special schools (see, for example, the work of Alan Fuller and Pete Dudley from the educational psychology service and the advisory service respectively).

To Whom are they Allowed to Speak?

To whom students are allowed to speak is also significant. Just as the possibility of my speaking face to face with the Minister for Education & Skills is remote, so too is the likelihood of students speaking face to face with those who hold equivalent power within their schools: who you talk to matters, and access to those who are able and willing to alter things in ways that step outside the tramlines of institutional hierarchy and habit too often remains a matter of luck and particular circumstance.

Despite the fact that in many schools not much seems to have changed for many years, there is some evidence that who students are now allowed to speak to is beginning to open up in new and interesting ways. Certainly, students

are gathering more data through interviews, questionnaires and other imaginative means with a wider range of people (including teachers, parents, members of the community as well as fellow students) than they used to, though the dangers are that they are doing so largely on behalf of others (adults) and in the interests of others (adults). Questions of audience are not, however, just confined to the data gathering stage. Arguably of much greater importance, and thus, unsurprisingly, still less frequently encountered, are occasions when meaning is made from the data, conclusions drawn from it, and action invited, all within the context of dialogue and discussion between students and (senior) staff. The 'Students as Researchers' work at Sharnbrook Upper School has travelled a long way down this path (see papers by Beth Crane, Chris Harding, and Louise Raymond in this issue and Worrall et al, 1999) and many aspects of primary practice in this area seem to be challenging traditional boundaries (see e.g. Peacock, 2001, and Wheatcroft Primary School in this issue).

What are they Allowed to Speak About?

For students in most schools, what you are allowed to speak about is, either by way of self-censorship or organisational guidance, more often than not confined to the relatively restricted matters of lunch breaks, discos and school trips. Teaching and learning remain largely forbidden areas of enquiry and if either are allowed into the circle of discussion, the questions and concerns that are raised are invariably identified and framed by teachers for teachers: students, as Louise Raymond in this issue and myself (Fielding 1998, 2001b) have argued are primarily treated as sources of data rather than agents of transformation.

However, there are signs of progress. In the article by students at Wheatcroft Primary School they talk about ways in which the research with their teachers has looked at matters to do with the nature of learning, not just in its narrowly conceived terms of test scores, but also in terms of its wider and more profound human sense of making meaning from and with the world around them. They remind us of the bodily preconditions (hunger!) and the emotional foundations (friendship, showing your feelings) for learning, as well as the range of ways it can be encouraged e.g. 'I believe that you can learn without writing' (Charlotte Y6). They remind us both of the necessity of difference e.g. 'Lots of children are different and it is important to ask their points of view and how they learn best' (Coral Y6) and the companion necessity of community e.g. team working, working with other people, taking responsibility for each other, the centrality of relationships in human learning. They remind us not only that they are as aware as adults of issues of power, belonging and significance, e.g. the blight of bullying, but also that they are more than capable of taking action in a concerted and communal way to address the challenges that they face e.g. the development of a system of playground buddies. They remind us, too, that the values of community as the precondition for the development of our being as persons can and should shape, not just the ambience but the organisational realities of schools: 'We do not believe in putting people into groups according to ability. Therefore everybody gets the same opportunity.' (Oliver Y6). Here, students and staff who form the

learning community of the school remind us of the fundamental necessity of equal value in an education system that is beginning to lose its capacity to understand or articulate what those values and perspectives look and feel like in the well-intentioned, but largely destructive, scramble for performance. Lastly, and in the current context of performance-obsessed earnestness, perhaps most importantly, they reclaim the existential realities of human experience e.g. 'We can have fun and be educated at the same time' (Fay Y5). It is interesting, too, that the manner in which they raise these issues reminds us that there are alternatives to the barrenness and boredom of bullet point thinking that has so bruised our imagination and bullied our prose into a debilitating and impatient brevity e.g. 'I would like to tell the whole world about how important it is to let children have fun in school ... (so it does not become) a dungeon trapped in its own dullness, a prison blowing away fun and school trips, sucking out laughter and playfulness.' (Alison Y6)

What Language is Encouraged / Allowed?

Even if the traditional taboos and restrictions on the topics of discussion are lifted there is then a further issue about the language that students are encouraged or allowed to use to articulate their concerns and enthusiasms. In their fascinating account of new developments currently being researched as part of a large ESRC (Economic & Social Research Council) project John MacBeath, Kate Myers and Helen Demetriou argue strongly for 'the importance of language and the need for children to have a conceptual vocabulary not only to articulate their views but to be able to recognise them' and for the necessity of 'teachers themselves having that vocabulary and acquiring the expertise to make it accessible to their pupils.'

A different kind of challenge concerns our response as teachers to those who side-step or marginalise such developments. Even if we open up new spaces to students, how willing are we to concede the legitimacy of their own way of expressing themselves? How widespread is the truth of Leora Cruddas's claim that 'some young people may not express opinions and ideas in ways that adults find acceptable'? Do we require a formal language which earns student the right to dialogue or do we accept a more diverse discourse that betrays different standpoints and preoccupations to our own? This is a relatively under-explored matter in the literature on student voice and one that is too readily passed over in our enthusiasm for the advent of new possibilities.

In her contribution to this special issue, Sara Bragg elegantly and insightfully draws our attention to some of the challenges and the possibilities that issues of language and identity raise. If we allow language that is offensive, not only in terms of conventional sensibilities, but also, and more deeply, in terms of what seem to be profoundly corrosive attitudes and dispositions, are we betraying our educational responsibilities? If we intervene, to what degree do we lose both the nature of the insights such articulation might afford and also rule out an encounter (between student and teacher) that holds the possibility of moving both parties on in ways that have mutually educative?

Recent work by Paul Doherty (Doherty, 2001) researching the nature of disaffection amongst secondary (high) school students suggests that, with at least some

groups of young people, it is important to intervene in a skilful, and positive manner to encourage them to articulate what is important to them in ways which they feel are authentic and meaningful. If one imposes a frame that is inquisitorial or exploitative or if students are required to speak the public language of the school, then the possibility of gaining access to what is distinctive about certain kinds of student perspectives is immediately compromised.

Dana Mitra also illustrates the dangers of an adult interpretation of student data: her research revealed that 'when adults analysed the data, they translated 'student speak' into adult words that did not always have the same meaning. Having ... the students at the table preserved the integrity in the student voices by ensuring the adults understood the issues students felt were most important.'

Having said all this, it is important not to be overwhelmed by the enormity of the issue facing us. Sara Bragg did learn a great deal from her students and they from her; Paul Doherty did come to understand the nature of disaffection better and go on to develop a new theory of disaffection-as-disengagement from which we can all learn. The reform leadership team Dana Mitra describes did understand the insight and power of 'student speak'. There are also positive examples within this issue of *FORUM* of ways in which students have been able to articulate what matters to them in ways that are their own rather than other people's.

In addition to Dana Mitra, two other international contributors to this special issue exemplify this point well. Firstly, the lyricism, energy and insight of one of Elena Silva's student reform group is palpable: 'We got squeaky wheels and flat tires ... Some smooth white walls rollin' their way right to college, gettin' oil all the way. And then the rest of us ... flat tires! Bumpin' on down the road, making all sorts of crude noises. Probably fall off real soon anyway. Ain't worth the grease.' Secondly, Marcia Prieto's ground-breaking work developing democratic practices with students in Chilean secondary (high) schools included innovative forms of data collection that the students themselves developed to gain access to the views and feelings of their fellow students. The language, the manner and the place of student interviewing were all significantly shaped by the perception that students were unlikely to open up, even with other students, unless they felt discursively at ease.

Listening

- *Who* is listening?
- *Why* are they listening?
- *How* are they listening?

If new approaches to student voice are beginning, slowly, hesitantly, but with increasing confidence, understanding and legitimacy to widen the scope both of who is allowed to speak, what they are allowed to speak about, and how they are allowed to speak about it, what then can we say about who listens, why they listen and how they do so? These questions are no less contested and complex than those to do with speaking: speaking and listening must inevitably condition each other reciprocally if they are to form the basis of vibrant learning and the possibility of significant change.

Who is Listening?

Too often the answers to questions about who is listening, why they are listening and how they do so makes depressing reading. Those in power too often do not listen, even if they hear what is said. The student council that is tokenistic (MacBeath & Mortimore, 2001; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000) because nobody in a position of power takes their recommendations or comments seriously is a phenomenon as old as schools councils themselves (see Chapman 1970, 1971 and Fielding 1973 for examples of work on school councils that predates the current upsurge of interest). The contemporary equivalent has a number of forms such as student focus groups and questionnaires about matters that concern teachers, governments and almost anyone other than students themselves. Here, though there is often an appearance of student involvement, the capacity to raise questions and issues that arise from students' own perceptions of the realities of their experience of schooling is even more restricted than within traditional student councils: the schedule for the focus group or questionnaire is invariably constructed by teachers or external researchers, rather than the students themselves. In each of these cases the danger is that whilst teachers may hear what students say, they do not cross the bridge to listening actively to what they mean.

Fortunately, this is not always so and there is growing evidence, both from articles presented here and from other contemporary research (see references cited in Fielding, 2001b), that teachers are beginning to listen to students in ways which have been unusual or fleeting in the past. This has partly to do with possibilities opened up through gradual changes in pedagogy. Developments such as formative assessment and target setting have within them the possibility of a more attentive capacity engagement between student and teacher. Whether or not that possibility is realised is, of course, another matter (see e.g. Fielding, 2001a for some reflections on target setting). The external framework of performativity (i.e. professional worth conspicuously demonstrated to a pervasive accountability by readily measurable means) within which we all now work makes listening difficult, even when it is intended: there are too many imperatives that require 'delivery', too much that demands coverage, too little that provides the enabling conditions for us to be quiet and attentive together in ways which make exploration or creativity a real possibility.

Nonetheless, new initiatives like those described in this special issue testify to approaches that are beginning to break new ground, approaches in which teachers are genuinely interested in not only hearing what students say but listening to what they might mean.

Why and How are They Listening?

Even if answers to the 'who' question include more of those with power and status than used to be the case, answers to the 'why' question too often suggest we have made little progress, no progress, or even a reversal of what advocates of democratic and wider human agency have worked for so hard in the last half century. Thus, if we ask why there is such an international upsurge of student consultation there is often a strong sense that it has as much to do with fear, control and a spurious discourse of stakeholder involvement than a desire to nurture

creativity, encourage greater freedom of thought and action, or usher in a genuine transformation of schools and workplaces as sites of shared power and responsibility. Following the work of Beth Humphries (Humphries, 1994), I would suggest that too often those in power are listening because through that process they gather more information which can then be used to enhance the process of containment and control (accumulation), or assist in the process of re-describing or reconfiguring students in ways that bind them more securely to the status quo (accommodation), or, indeed, reaffirm the powerful in their superiority and confirm students in their existing lot (appropriation) (see Fielding, 1998). Even where that is not the case, the worry is that the frameworks of performativity provide both the motive and the means of a carefully constrained consultation. If teachers are constantly having to demonstrate their success to an incessant, humanly diminishing accountability in ways which are easily measured, instantly understood and interminably recorded, small wonder that recourse to 'student voice' is seen as a means of heading off difficulty or demonstrating compliance to the recurrent imperatives of the market. In these circumstances the 'why' of listening has more to do with personal survival, an astute response to an additional means of surveillance, than it has to do with recognition of student insight or the possibility of mutual learning.

In contrast, a positive reading of the emergence of new practices in which students and teachers explore and research issues of common concern and interest together (students as co-researchers) or ones in which students identify issues and research them with teachers in the role of research assistants and facilitators (students as researchers) point to a quite different set of answers to questions of why and how teachers listen to student voices. Within these regimes listening is important because it has to do with the nature of learning itself and its relationship with teaching that helps learning to emerge.

Firstly, listening is a prerequisite for students learning for themselves: students need to listen to each other in order to learn from each other, for each other and for themselves. As the Chilean student researchers said in Marcia Prieto's paper, 'We have learned how to share our own ideas, to respect the other's opinion and value those that thought differently.' Students also need to listen to their teachers, to others who care for them, and to their own voices emerging in dialogue with others. This is clearly a feature of buddying systems and peer learning as well as the more mainstream activities that take place on a daily basis in classrooms.

Secondly, if as a teacher you are able to listen to what your students say, what they feel, then you are more likely to understand what will help them to learn. For Charlotte at Wheatcroft Primary School 'listening to children is vital so that children are happier and teachers know what they like and what they can do', whilst Matthew is in no doubt that he 'would prefer this school to any others because the teachers have time for you.' If things get in the way of that process it becomes increasingly hard to engage in teaching as an educative process. If you are prevented from listening you cannot pursue learning as a joint undertaking or teaching as a human encounter.

Thirdly, in these new ways of working teachers are listening, not just to understand, but to learn: learn more

about their students; learn more about their teaching; learn more about the nature of learning. John MacBeath, Kate Myers and Helen Demetriou provide some very interesting preliminary findings that point to children 'searching for meaning' and teachers palpably demonstrating the quality of their own reflectiveness. This attentiveness and the responsiveness that partners it exemplify the necessity of dialogue and, by implication, the poverty of 'delivery' as a metaphor or reality of contemporary approaches to teaching and learning. It also points to the emergence of what I have elsewhere called a 'radical collegiality' (Fielding, 1999), that is a collegiality in which teachers learn with and from their students as well as from their fellow teachers. In Louise Raymond's view the 'Students as Researchers' initiative 'has been profoundly important in terms of staff members' professional development as regards changing the way they think about their lessons and working with students in different ways to make learning better.' In the joint undertaking of enquiry both students and teachers are equal partners in the emergence of new knowledge which they create together. In Beth Crane's view the *Students as Researchers* project at Sharnbrook Upper School 'changed how some staff at the school considered their students, encouraging them to think of students more as equals, as a source of help in making the most of their teaching.' In Marcia Prieto's 'Students as Researchers' project in Chile 'students working as equals with university staff with the same rights to propose and to decide was an essential feature of the team.'

Lastly, listening is important because it is central both to a wider and deeper commitment to the development of agency in a democratic society and to our sense of human solidarity, to our emergent humanity as an achievement which certain kinds of relationships and circumstances can either enable or frustrate. Thus, for Andrew, 'Wheatcroft has helped me to be me and without the support I have received I would have been upset and depressed' and for Clare it is important to have your voice heard because it 'makes you feel free.' For Beth Crane, *Students as Researchers* 'changed how students thought of themselves. They came to feel like a more valued and respected resource and to recognise that they were actually an education knowledge base.' For the Chilean research team, 'The experiences lived by working as real partners with students reminded us of the necessity of treating them and respecting them, not only as equals, but also as people that have something different and important to offer.'

Skills

- Are the skills of dialogue *encouraged and supported* through training or other appropriate means?
- Are those skills understood, developed and practised within the *context of democratic values and dispositions*?
- Are those skills themselves *transformed* by those values and dispositions?

Are the Skills of Dialogue Encouraged and Supported through Training or Other Appropriate Means?

One of the standard objections to increased calls for student voice in the narrative of schooling has been, and still is, that students lack the capacity or the skills to

articulate what is important, insightful or relevant to anything other than the more trivial or insignificant of matters. Such a line of argument is becoming increasingly suspect, though there is little sign that its proponents acknowledge its demise.

There are, of course, at least two different kinds of response to such a position, both of which are born out in the research presented within this issue of *FORUM*. The first is that if students are given no support in developing the skills of dialogue then it is hardly surprising that they sometimes struggle to demonstrate their skills in this domain. The second is that, where they have been given the opportunity to develop these capacities, they more often than not demonstrate they are in fact very capable.

Are Those Skills Understood, Developed and Practised within the Context of Democratic Values and Dispositions? Are Those Skills Themselves Transformed by Those Values and Dispositions?

Skills are important, but they are not, and have never been, enough. Arguably, the most profound failing of New Labour government policy in education was, and continues to be, its refusal to understand the inadequacy of predominantly technical solutions (teaching as delivery) to more profound human challenges (learning as a collaborative making of meaning). Unless teachers and students see the skills and capacities associated with the growth of student voice as integrally connected with the practical realities of democracy and democratic citizenship in the lived, day-to-day context of real schools as they exist now, then those skills will turn out to be virtually worthless. They will quickly become ephemeral tricks that not only have no genuine significance for those who use them, but, just as importantly, for those on whose behalf they have been developed. They might occasionally be handy for the emerging CV or UCAS (university entrance) form. But this is to reduce the richness of a vibrant public resource to the poverty of a private possession. Interestingly, in the concluding section of her paper Beth Crane points beyond the skills of research to the wider and deeper fulfilment of democratic communal engagement: 'The feeling of giving something back to the school, my fellow students and future students in an ongoing way was fantastic.' Certainly, for the Chilean student researchers, the thing that mattered 'most of all' was the desire 'to construct a better society in which everyone was committed to the rights, duties and responsibilities of democratic living.'

Attitudes and Dispositions

- How do those involved *regard each other*?
- To what degree are the *principle of equal value* and the *dispositions of care* felt reciprocally and demonstrated through the reality of daily encounter?

How Do Those Involved Regard Each Other? To What Degree are the Principle of Equal Value and the Dispositions of Care Felt Reciprocally and Demonstrated through the Reality of Daily Encounter?

The importance of transforming skills through particular kinds of disposition into something that ceases to be a mere skill and becomes instead a practical expression of an educational relationship and a democratic way of life

has always been and will always be hard. But it is equally true that it has been and always will be possible, has been and always will be necessary.

Too often, and inevitably, developments in the field of student voice founder because the teachers and other adults involved do not believe in their hearts, and therefore in the felt realities of their actions, that student voice is important, or, indeed, that some students are important. As one of the young women Leora Cruddas worked with put it, 'It's the way they (the teachers) talk to us. We're not dirt you know.' For many teachers, student voice is seen as either peripheral, irrelevant or corrosive of the already diminishing legitimacy of teacher professionalism. As we have already noted, for many students, too, student voice is, at best, something a small number of other students, often not like them, do with a small number of teachers, often not like other teachers, to no good effect. Fellow students are seen as 'boffins', or other marginalised equivalents, and teachers are seen in stereotypical ways that retain traditional roles and demarcations. In other words, the comfort of the status quo often suits more students and teachers than the more demanding alternatives that are beginning to emerge.

However, it does not have to be like that. What comes through again and again from those teachers and students involved in these new ways of working as the centrality of certain kinds of human relationships within the process of education. Sara Bragg insists that 'it was the quality of our relationship – its intensity and its fierce ambivalence – that motivated me to seek answers to the puzzles they posed'; Perpetua Kirby underscores the necessity and power of a dialogic relationship between students and teachers involved in participatory research; and Leora Cruddas rightly reminds us of the importance of Ken Robinson's affirmation that, 'At the heart of education is the relationship between teachers and learners and by extension the relationship between learners – young people themselves.' (Robinson, 2001, p. 101) This was certainly one of the most striking things about the children's account of the student voice work at Wheatcroft Primary school where there is a strong sense of children and teachers working and learning together.

There have always been gifted and committed individual teachers who have pioneered student voice work in their own classrooms and sometimes in their own schools. But the burden of setting up such approaches and keeping them going, frequently in hostile internal and external circumstances, often proves too much. Even when they do manage to gain some degree of institutional support the initiatives these colleagues create too often founder with their departure or their exhaustion. Hence the importance of systems.

Systems

- *How often* does dialogue and encounter in which student voice is centrally important occur?
- *Who decides?*
- How do the systems enshrining the value and necessity of student voice mesh with or *relate to other organisational arrangements* (particularly those involving adults)?

How Often Does Dialogue and Encounter in Which Student Voice is Centrally Important Occur? Who Decides?

It is, of course, true that systems alone cannot accomplish significant change. How many school councils can we all think of that have flourished for a while but have subsequently declined from their former vibrancy and engagement with real issues into a mechanistic and largely tokenistic set of procedures for recycling the minimal and predictable minutiae of the status quo? However, systems remain important. One of the key issues, if not in the emergence then certainly in the continuation and incorporation of student voice as a characteristic of the school as a learning community, has to do with the systems and structures that are created to give it public status and system-wide impact. The PLP (Personal Learning Planning) initiative explored by Kate Bullock and Felicity Wikeley shows promising signs of having an impact in some schools, partly because they were developing a systemic approach and partly because, 'learning was necessary for tutors as well as students. A one-to-one dialogue is clearly a learning opportunity for teachers, as well as students, and needs to be heralded as such.' Systems that show signs of success seem to be those where dialogue is emerging as a central feature of their way of working.

In the UK, school councils have recently enjoyed a revival and not just because citizenship has become part of the National Curriculum. There have also been a number of other important additions to whole school approaches to student-led and student informed practices, often connected to the emergence of emotional literacy and emotional intelligence, that are part of how schools conduct their daily work together. Peer-led counselling, buddying, and the now widely practised circle time are the most prominent examples.

How Do the Systems Enshrining the Value and Necessity of Student Voice Mesh with or Relate to Other Organisational Arrangements (Particularly Those Involving Adults)?

One of the most interesting challenges which such developments encounter has to do with, not just their sustainability and the degree of support both students and teachers are prepared to give them, but crucially with how these new arrangements map on to the existing mechanisms for consultation and renewal that exist for e.g. the teachers in the school. In other words, what is the connection between the arrangements for student voice and for teacher voice within the school? Do the two systems exist alongside each other without any overt connection between them? Or do they inform and sustain each other, either covertly or in ways which the school chooses to celebrate in public? It seems pretty clear that these are the next steps that need to be considered if student voice is to be woven into the fabric of school life, rather than being a decorative motif that can be removed as and when the occasion and the judgement of (head)teachers demands.

Organisational Culture

- Do the *cultural norms and values* of the school proclaim the centrality of student voice within the

context of education as a shared responsibility and shared achievement?

- Do the *practices, traditions and routine daily encounters* demonstrate values supportive of student voice?

It is clear from the discussion of systems, that systems are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the kinds of changes which advocates of student voice suggest we should implement. Michael Fullan was one of the first to help us to understand that reculturing must precede, or at least be co-terminus with, restructuring. In other words, if we are to successfully introduce new ways of working and sustain them with organisational arrangements that help them to thrive beyond the single individual or the single classroom, then we need to develop different attitudes and dispositions which will make them a felt necessity, rather than an imposed requirement. Whilst we are clearer about the necessity of reculturing, making it real remains more difficult than we would want and less clear than we would wish. There are nonetheless, interesting examples emerging from the work described in this Special Issue of *FORUM*. Dana Mitra talks of the importance of 'taking several steps to scaffold the process of student participation in the previously teacher-only domain of school change.' My own experience of working with Sharnbrook Upper School over the five years in which 'Students as Researchers' has grown from an interesting initiative to a central component of the school's approach to curriculum and organisational renewal suggests that great care needs to be taken, not only to be open and honest, but actively solicitous of the experience and expertise, not just the articulated opinion, of members of staff. What is also clear is that the development of student voice at the expense or to the exclusion of teacher voice is a serious mistake. The latter is a necessary condition of the former: staff are unlikely to support developments that encourage positive ideals for students which thereby expose the poverty of their own participatory arrangements.

Spaces and the Making of Meaning

- Where are the public spaces (physical and metaphorical) in which these encounters might take place?
- Who controls them?
- What values shape their being and their use?

If we start to take matters of structure and culture seriously, if we start to move beyond the mere inculcation of skills and embrace matters of attitude and disposition, then potentially at any rate, at this point in the long journey of student voice within the context of public education, we stand a good chance of moving into a qualitatively different phase of its development.

Where are the Public Spaces (Physical and Metaphorical) in Which These Encounters Might Take Place? Who Controls Them? What Values Shape their Being and their Use?

It seems to me that the success or otherwise of this transition rests significantly on the extent to which we are able to move towards a circumstance in which we construct new practices and create new spaces (physical

and metaphorical) within which we (students, teachers and others) can make meaning together. Schools are currently awash with data, most of which is externally driven and much of which is tangential to the core purposes of schools as educational institutions. Much is only partially understood by those to whom it refers and is too often an impediment to furthering the very things it intends. Making meaning is too often forestalled by the exhausted satisfaction of having collected an impressive, if largely meaningless, array of data.

Even within the student voice movement there is far too much that turns out, despite good will, much effort and considerable dedication, to be cumulative data of varying quality and uncertain meaning. What we have too little to say about is how meaning is made from data. Is meaning constructed in dialogue or delivered on a spreadsheet? Is meaning made or masked by the confidence and crispness of presentation? Making meaning from the data is as important as collecting it in the first place: unless we struggle with the difficult, but immensely rewarding, process of making sense of the information we have collected then our effort and our commitment will be much less fruitful than it could or should have been.

There are at least two issues here. Firstly, how do we support student voice initiatives in the process of making meaning from their work? Secondly, how does the school enable students and teachers to come together in public ways and public places to engage in dialogue about issues emerging from their research and/or their deliberations? Tackling the first issue is essential if the quality of student research and deliberation is to carry conviction with their peers and their teachers. Tackling the second issue is potentially transformational: it has within it the possibility of schools becoming learning communities in which the voices of students and teachers (and others) are acknowledged as legitimately different and of equal value, the necessary partners in dialogue about how we learn, how we live and the kind of place we wish our community to become.

Action

- What *action* is taken?
- Who feels *responsible*?
- What *happens* if aspirations and good intentions are not realised?

What Action is Taken? Who Feels Responsible? What Happens If Aspirations and Good Intentions are Not Realised?

Having made meaning, having worked through the range of what is possible and what is desirable, we then need to act: as the philosopher John Macmurray has it, 'all meaningful knowledge is for the sake of action' (Macmurray 1957 p.15). If there is one lesson to be learned from both the history of student voice initiatives and from the new wave of current research and development work it is that action is necessary. The scepticism of Isobel Urquart's interviewees in asking 'If there's anything that they can do, will it happen?' is both predictable and legitimate and makes the less frequently encountered contrast of Chris Harding's experience all the more remarkable. For him it was the engagement in collective change processes and the school's capacity to

act on the recommendations of the research, in this case on the system of assessment and profiling, 'that gave me a great sense of achievement.'

It may be that the action recommended or hoped for is not possible or not agreed by those who are in a position to make final choices. But action, if only in terms of a considered and public response, remains a necessary consequence of the collective endeavour in which the voices of students spoke with conviction and determination. Perpetua Kirby reminds us that 'often too much emphasis is on peer research being positive for the participating young researchers and too little on how this will impact on the many respondents they research.'

The most satisfactory arrangements I have come across are ones in which it is agreed by the headteacher / principal, the senior management team, the governing body / board, or whoever carries the decision making powers of the school with regard to the issue in question, that a proper professional response to the report or recommendations is both an obligation and a requirement. This does not bind those in power to agree to what is being suggested; it does, however, bind them to the seriousness and the delight of dialogue in, usually public, ways that both honour and learn from students' work and their contribution to the furtherance of the school as a learning community in a democratic society.

The Future

- Do we need *new structures*?
- Do we need *new ways of relating to each other*?

Student Voice in the Context of Schooling as Performance

It is still too early to make a reasonable judgement about whether or not the current wave of interest in student voice has within it the seeds of transformation. On the one hand, there is much that suggests an uncomfortably conformist and controlling reading of these new developments. On the other hand, at its best and most adventurous, there is much to be optimistic about in the emerging student voice movement: there does seem to be a small number of examples of 'prefigurative practice' (Dale & Fielding 1989), that is to say, groundbreaking practice that anticipates the future now and has within it the capacity, not only to inspire, but also to sustain developments until the wider society moves more confidently in the direction suggested.

In the first of these two scenarios an increasing advocacy of student voice is best understood as a constructivist version of total quality management (Dahlberg et al 1999 p.95). Here the voice of the student becomes the voice of the customer disciplining the teacher into the pre-ordained, imperfectly internalised competences of government edict and market responsiveness. Here the rigours of performance culture deepen the accountability and responsiveness of teachers as pedagogic technicians and sustain a notion of students as the collectors of educational products (test results, certificates, saleable skills) that 'add value' to their employment prospects. Under these conditions student focus groups and questionnaires are unlikely to produce anything that transgresses broadly accepted, if more flexibly interpreted, notions of what it is teachers and

students should be doing. Despite our initial enthusiasm, it is unlikely that the framework which sustains and animates this more active and more strident student voice will do anything other than confirm what we presently think and require a more intensively pursued version of what we currently try to do.

Students are as much the products of a society that thinks and speaks of education as a set of commodities to be delivered as those who teach within it: hence the importance of Leora Cruddas's warning that we should be careful not to assume young people are 'free to represent their own interests transparently.' She, along with other contributors to this Special Issue, also reminds us that students are a gender differentiated group. The realities of race and class are also insistently important: the elegance and insight of Elena Silva's cautionary remarks will not go away just because we are passionately committed to transformative ideals: 'we must recognise that the school's embossed invitation to participate looks unfamiliar, unattractive, or out of reach to many students, especially those most in need of serious changes at their school.'

Finally, even if we engage in increasingly insightful and welcoming ways to the range of voices that articulate something of what our students think and feel about the multiple realities of 21st Century schooling, the pressures of performance carry with them the partialities of presumption and the predilection for, often premature, closure. Sara Bragg's concern that 'the pressure of needing rapid results may lead us to listen most readily to voices that make immediate sense' has a wide-ranging resonance. Her plea that we 'take our time with the anomalous, to allow what doesn't fit or produces unexpected reactions in us to disrupt our assumptions and habitual ways of working – because ... it is from these that we may, in the end, learn most' stands little chance of realisation in a context where the timeline within which we have to understand and demonstrate 'what works' is conditioned by imperatives that have an increasingly short attention span. The patience and attentiveness for which she argues are only sustainable in contexts where performativity is either contained or replaced by a more robust, more self-consciously education-centred professionalism.

Student Voice and the Development of New Communities of Practice

In contrast to this rather chilling prospect, there are a few signs that an alternative scenario is hesitantly beginning to emerge, albeit in isolated pockets, often supported by universities or external consultants. Groups of teachers and students together are gradually creating new realities that speak a different language that names quite other possibilities. Not only does it offer teachers and students an opportunity 'to revitalise a dialogue', in the words of Isobel Urquart, it also 'offers teachers and others a creative practical alternative to the adult-centred bureaucracy that 'cramps' much of modern schooling.'

Furthermore, in what I earlier called this 'prefigurative practice' teachers and students are not confined by agendas set by governments or markets. Of course, they acknowledge their importance and meet what requirements their circumstances demand. However, they go beyond what is currently required to create a quite different present, a present that has within it a future that is more securely centred on the development of persons in

and through community, rather than the growth of consumers in and through the market. Insofar as students and teachers do this together, their practices are 'transitive', transgressive, emancipatory, creative of quite different realities to those we are currently required to emulate: 'Children and adults combine power and create new forms of wisdom when they explore learning together' (Lincoln, 1995, p. 89). What is described in some of the contributions to this issue of *FORUM*, what is beginning to happen in a number of other schools and colleges, both here in the UK and in North America, South America and Australasia, has within it the possibility of new communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998), new ways of working, new ways of learning to be and become persons that make very different demands on students and teachers. What we see, in Marcia Prieto's words, is the emergence of 'very different kinds of partnership between students and teachers' in which 'each needs the other in much more searching and exhilarating ways than we currently acknowledge or fully understand.' The accepted roles of student and teacher become less mutually exclusive, more open to extension and reversal, more open to mutual learning, more welcoming of a radical collegiality (Fielding, 1999).

On the Necessity of Intervention

Which of these two directions student voice work takes in the next few years is difficult to gauge. The likelihood is that the context of performativity will give a substantial boost to the former rather than the latter: students may well become increasingly vocal and demanding, their language replicating the discourse of performance and their requirements fitting ever more snugly within the templates of accepted 'good practice'. Whilst not necessarily a disaster, such a future runs the risk of being increasingly fraught and sadly disappointing for all concerned. In it, teachers would become threatened where they could be invigorated, defensive where they could be open and exploratory; students would become unevenly demanding of the partnership of learning and ungenerous in their understanding of their teachers, themselves and the possibility of schooling as an educative process.

The alternative is that we develop new communities of practice shaped by an essentially dialogic form of engagement. This emphasis on dialogue and the communal is important and, in my view, essential. As Jean Rudduck and Julia Flutter have recently reminded us, it is important to 'explore the need for change with pupils themselves – what Ted Aoki (1984) called a 'communal venturing forth'; the discussion of purpose, he said, was a precondition of working effectively together.' (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000, p. 84) Teachers cannot create new roles and realities without the support and encouragement of their students: students cannot construct more imaginative and fulfilling realities of learning without a reciprocal engagement with their teachers. We need each other to be and become ourselves, to be and become both learners and teachers of each other together. As Yvonna Lincoln reminds us with characteristic insight and eloquence, 'Teachers can elicit student voices. And teachers can, in the process, be led to discover their own voices. One cannot happen without the other, but happily the achievement of voice is mutual, and teachers who help

students to find student voices will discover that their own voices are clearer and stronger in the process. (Lincoln, 1995, p. 93).

We will not get anywhere unless we start from a different set of assumptions and understandings to those that dominate contemporary thinking and thereby ensure the disappointments and frustrations that, in the UK at least, are currently resulting in the flight from teaching and the alienation from a heavily scripted form of learning. The discourse of 'delivery' is emblematic of the intellectual poverty and effective incarceration of our professional judgement and our daily desire: our passion for teaching; our delight in what we might be and become together with those for whom we have and share daily responsibility; these necessary ingredients of a lived and living commitment to education struggle to find a voice amid the clutter of criteria and the tyranny of targets (Fielding, 2001a).

The student voice movement has within it the possibility of educational transformation: to achieve this potential we will have to discard the now moribund framework of school effectiveness and embrace a view of education which understands that the means of our engagement cannot sensibly be separated from the nature of our aspirations. The narrow instrumentalism of the high performance school must give way to the more widely conceived aspirations of a person-centred education (Fielding 2000a&b).

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Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Who</u> is allowed to speak? • <u>To whom</u> are they allowed to speak? • <u>What</u> language is encouraged / allowed?
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Who</u> is listening? • <u>Why</u> are they listening? • <u>How</u> are they listening?
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the skills of dialogue <u>encouraged and supported</u> through training or other appropriate means? • Are those skills understood, developed and practised within the <u>context of democratic values and dispositions</u>? • Are those skills themselves <u>transformed</u> by those values and dispositions?
Attitudes & Dispositions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do those involved <u>regard each other</u>? • To what degree are the <u>principle of equal value</u> and the <u>dispositions of care</u> felt reciprocally and demonstrated through the reality of daily encounter?
Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>How often</u> does dialogue and encounter in which student voice is centrally important occur? • Who <u>decides</u>? • How do the systems enshrining the value and necessity of student voice mesh with or <u>relate to other organisational arrangements</u> (particularly those involving adults)?
Organisational Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the <u>cultural norms and values</u> of the school proclaim the centrality of student voice within the context of education as a shared responsibility and shared achievement? • Do the <u>practices, traditions and routine daily encounters</u> demonstrate values supportive of student voice?
Spaces and the Making of Meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Where</u> are the public spaces (physical and metaphorical) in which these encounters might take place? • <u>Who</u> controls them? • What <u>values</u> shape their being and their use?
Action The Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we need <u>new structures</u>? • Do we need <u>new ways of relating to each other</u>?



ESRC Network Project

Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning

Schools across the country
are working with research
teams on six research
projects over two years.

Members of the national Network
will contribute to the core team's
collective experience and
investigations of pupil consulta-
tion and serve as channels for
the dissemination of accounts of
practice and research findings.

What is the Network Project about?

Working with teachers to:

- * develop skills and strategies for consulting pupils about teaching and learning;
- * gather evidence of the power of pupils' account/analyses to improve teaching and learning;
- * develop ways of reflecting the principle of consultation and evaluate the impact on pupils, teachers and schools of supporting pupil consultation and participation.

The Network Project is part of the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme

Network Project Structure

Members of national
research network on
pupil consultation

Researchers work with teachers on the Network agenda:

Project 1: How teachers respond to pupil ideas on improving teaching and learning in different subjects.
Researchers: Donald McIntyre and David Peddar

Project 3: Pupil perspectives and participation: starting and sustaining the process.
Researchers: Michael Fielding and Sara Bragg

Project 5: How the conditions of learning in school and classroom affect the identity and participation of different groups of pupils.
Researchers: Madeleine Arnot, Diane Reay and Beth Wang

Researchers support teachers on the school agenda:

Project 2: Ways of consulting pupils about teaching and learning and evaluating the impact.
Researchers: John McBeath, Kate Myers and Helen Demetriou.

Project 4: The potential of pupils to act as (co-)researchers into the process of teaching and learning.
Researchers: Michael Fielding and Sara Bragg.

Project 6: Breaking new ground: innovative school initiatives involving pupil consultation and participation.
Researcher: Julia Flutter.

Researchers work with the research community

Project 7: The Meta Study: pupil voice and pupil learning.
Researcher: Julia Flutter

Contacts: Project co-ordinator: Jean Rudduck
Network co-ordinator: Nick Brown
Network secretary: Nichola Daily

Homerton College
Cambridge
CB2 2PH

phone (+44)01223 507309
fax (+44) 01223 507258
e-mail nd241@cam.ac.uk
www.consultingpupils.co.uk